

BECOMING *RAGGARE*: MATERIALITY THROUGH THE CAR

A Sensory Exploration of Car Phenomenology Within the *Raggar* Subculture

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ABSTRACT

Raggare is a unique and rather understudied subculture within Scandinavia that emerged in the 1950s and has been vibrant since. They are noted for their affection towards 1950s American aesthetics and, most importantly, American vintage cars. In Sweden, these cars are known as *raggarbilar*, and I contend these vehicles are central to how social interactions occur between *raggare*. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how cars create social bonds by looking at *raggarbilar* through the lens of *raggare* and in this way investigating how and why the cars fascinate people. I use sensory methodology to examine how cars are approached and embraced by *raggare*, arguing that sensuous experiences are fundamental to the perception of the materiality of cars. Theoretically, I use materiality and material culture as guidelines for how objects enforce cultural and social significance. More specifically, Alfred Gell's notion of *the technology of enchantment* is utilized to understand the effects and social agency of artefacts and I develop this notion further with what I call *the sensory enchantment of materiality*. During ten weeks of ethnographic fieldwork that took place in different garages in Västernorrland county, along with semi-structured interviews and the usage of visual instruments, I explored the interconnectedness between cars, people, and environment to investigate how cars are objects capable of enchantment and persuasion to *raggare*. Overall, *raggarbilar* are multi-sensory objects that are perceived as different from other cars and create certain phenomenological experiences that are shared between *raggare*, and thus, bring the subculture together.

Keywords: *raggare*, *raggarbilar*, materiality, sensory methodology, Alfred Gell, enchantment, agency, anthropomorphism, embodiment, automobiles

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All photos by the author.

GLOSSARY

Car cruising: Cruising is a common activity within the *raggar* subculture and involves a large number of cars driving slowly behind each other along public highways.

EPA-tractor: Also known as *A-traktor*, is a passenger car that has been modified to not cross more than 30 kilometer per hour thus making it legal for persons under the age of 18 to drive them.

Jänkare: See *raggarbil*. “Jänkare” is a Swedish slang word for *raggarbil*. The word comes from the English “yankees” which initiate something that originally came from The United States.

Pilsnerraggare: One of the younger types of *raggare* and characterized for driving together in large groups, playing loud music inside the cars, and drinking alcohol. *Pilsnerraggare* do not drive a traditional *raggarbil*. For example, it is more commonly that they drive a Volvo 740 that has a ‘trashy’ look to them.

Raggarbil(ar): *Raggarbilar* (plural) is the Swedish word to describe American vintage cars from the 1950s to 1970s. Some of the more prominent car brands are Cadillac, Pontiac, Oldsmobile, Dodge Chevrolet, and Plymouth among many other American labels. *Raggarbil* (singular) will be frequently used throughout the thesis because it captures the essence of the cars within the Swedish context.

Raggare (raggar-): Someone who is part of the *raggar* subculture. This involves owning a *raggarbil*, going to car cruises and car festivals or simply having an interest in the *raggar* subculture and its aesthetics. The word *greaser* is an alternative English translation to describe *raggare* although I am using the Swedish concept of *raggare* or *raggar* when describing the subculture.

Raggar subculture: Swedish “raggarkultur” is a motor-based subculture with a great affection for *raggarbilar*.

V8 engine: A V8 engine refers to the eight-cylinder reciprocating engine which is a central feature of *raggarbilar*.

Wunderbaum: Also known as *doftgran*, are fir-tree shaped scents made of paper that are popular decorations within the *raggar* subculture to make cars smell pleasant inside.

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PART I – THESIS EXPOSITION

1. Introduction

The mixed smell of cold air, oil and gas hits my nose as I open the garage door. The echoing sound of classic rock music from the radio is filling the garage together with melodic dripping from the coffee machine. On the table there are a few boxes of various sweet biscuits such as punch rollers and gingerbread – you can choose as you like, and you are sure to be provided a bitter cup of coffee to go with it. The Swedish way of sharing something sweet with coffee creates an exciting element to the up-coming discussions that will take place around the table. The room is packed with items: car parts, jackscrews, tools, and handkerchiefs full of oil stains spread out all around the latest projects. Shelves cover the walls, full of even more boxes and tools of various sorts, with one bookshelf is dedicated to old car magazines. A few motorcycles and a dragster are also filling up the floor space. More importantly, however, is the dominating presence of the American vintage cars.

The attendance of these cars is intimidating. The shiny surface is polished to its perfection – one is almost scared to pass by without accidentally scratching the chrome. The well-designed lines following the facade creates an extended illusion of the length to these already massive cars. On the rear-view mirror inside the car a few tree-shaped wunderbaums are swinging and their scent is mixing up with the strong leather smelling seats. American 1950s styled details too can be spotted: some vinyl records, pillows with the Stars and Stripes flag, and big dice hanging next to the car freshener. It is easy to imagine how proud the driver must feel while sitting behind the big yet thin steering wheel as this is a material that bewitches both the driver and the audience looking at it.

I am sitting down sipping my cup of coffee with a few middle-aged men in this garage and my father is one of them. He and his friends come to this garage in central Örnköldsvik every Wednesday for some chatting. Because of the current Covid-19 pandemic, the chairs are two meters apart and one chair is dedicated to a small dog named Cinnamon. They come here to sit down and discuss their favourite topic: *raggarbilar* which is the Swedish word for American vintage cars. They are part of the *ragnar* subculture – a car-based subculture that is united by a shared affection towards the American vintage car.

The meetings between my father and his friends are informal yet close to a meeting of sorts, being a ceremony of talking, sharing skills and knowledge about cars. It is a safe place for them – a place to relax and share their passion for cars. When they speak in their heavy Northern

Swedish dialect, they talk about all sorts of topics concerning cars. Car brands and year models of cars are spoken fluently, without hesitation. Same for price ranges – they have looked up every advertisement or every car item and know exactly how much it should cost. They all know which sellers to avoid and which ones to trust and they are happy to share contacts of people who are specifically well-known for certain detailed information about car parts or technical work.

I grew up in a family with a great affiliation with cars. My father and brother spend most of their time talking, watching videos, and hanging out in their garages with their friends to work on cars, often till late at night. My mother is not as interested but enjoys cruises – the social activity of driving the cars very slowly along public highways to show off their cars – and she accompanies my father to car festivals all around Sweden. I, on the other hand, have never shared the same curiosity for the vehicles and the subculture that my family is so passionate about – perhaps a rebellious act to be different from the rest of my family. Despite being disinterested in cars and the *raggar* subculture, I have always been fascinated by my father and his friends' close kinship. They have known each other since their early adolescence. When they were young, they were driving their first *raggarbil* between different towns in Västernorrland, a coastal county in Northern Sweden, to meet each other, partying inside of the cars and hoping for flirtatious encounters. *Raggare*, as the people within the subculture are called, is what this thesis focusses upon: what is it about *raggarbilar*, the American vintage cars that are characterized by their aesthetic, sound, way of driving and size, that can occupy someone's life so much and provide them with connection to others? Why are *raggare* so fascinated by them? And what is it about these cars that I do not understand?

I use the conception of materiality as a theoretical ground to understand the material culture of the cars. In this way, I have explored how social effects flow through the *raggarbilar*. More specifically, I have utilized Daniel Miller's (2001) concept of "the humanity of the car" that describes the car beyond its physicality and how cars affect human beings, as well as Alfred Gell's (1992) "the technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology." The Gellian theoretical approach helps to explain the relational mediation between art and human beings and why some objects are more powerful than others. Despite being helpful insights to approaching cars, they both lack sentient elements and are therefore slightly insufficient for my case; hence, I have combined these two approaches through a sensory methodology by developing my own concept of *the sensory enchantment of materiality*, in order to show that objects such as cars, and especially the *raggarbil*, is a multi-sensory object, enhancing emotions and nostalgia and that senses in relation to objects can be key to social bonding between people.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

Raggarbilar are at the heart of the *raggar* subculture, but little has been explored on the underlying features of the cars that fascinate people (cf. Berglind 2005; Bjurström 1990; O'Dell 1997; Rynell 1981; Åhlström 2009). Because I believe that senses have an important role in how cars are being understood, I have focused on the issues of materiality through a sensuous lens. The aim of this thesis is to explore how cars, and especially the *raggarbil*, through its materiality and physicality, connects people. The research questions I have investigated are: how are cars shaping social relations and how is the materiality of cars and their sensuous quality emerged and manifested by *raggare*? In this way, I hope to contribute to the quite recently explored area of car material and sensuous research as well as exploring how the cultural relation between people and cars stretches beyond material matters. This includes questions of agency, anthropomorphism, embodiment, aesthetics, phenomenology, nostalgia, and place.

Albeit being a vibrant subculture still, the *raggar* subculture is rather understudied and has eluded in the academic eye for many years. This is very unfortunate considering how long it has been present in the Scandinavian countries and how much there is to learn and explore among them. While this study mainly focuses on the materiality of the *raggarbil*, I still hope that my research will bring a nuanced perspective to the subculture and give them the attention they deserve.

1.2 Thesis Overview

This thesis is divided into three parts: PART I: THESIS EXPOSITION introduces the central topic of the thesis, its purpose and context. It includes a historical background to the *raggar* subculture, followed by my theoretical approach to the research that is comprised by an overview on previous anthropological studies on cars. It then continues with a review of the material culture subfield and Alfred Gell's (1992) concept *the technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology*. PART I ends with my methodological approach, containing sensory methodology inspired by Merleau-Ponty (2012 [1945]), Pink (2009; 2015) and Stoller (1989; 1997), my use of visual representation (Rose and Tolia-Kelly 2012), and some musings on positionality. In many ways, the method is entangled with my theory, therefore I have adopted an explorative method, sensory method, while also maintaining Miller's materiality (2005) and Gell's 'enchantment' (1992) as guidelines for the role of senses in connection to

raggarbilar. Lastly, I mention the difficulties of performing a Master's thesis during the Covid-19 pandemic which has affected the quality of my investigations as well as the quality of data available, shaping my use of method as well as the direction of my ethnography.

In PART II: CAR COMPANIONSHIP, I focus on the stories, or tales as I call them, of me and my informants' connections and perceptions of cars. While my own relationship to *raggarbilar* is complicated, being disinterested and resentful of it when I was younger, my interlocutors experience it in a different way: as an intimate and personal connection. I find a contrast in my experiences, and theirs, where they have found kinship with the vehicles and the culture around them, while I did not. Furthermore, PART II highlights the aspects of material culture, how the cars express agency and how the cars affect their owners, thus it gives an introduction to how relational conditions are played out. It offers an opening to understand how the cars create emotional attachments which will later be discussed in PART III: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE CAR.

PART III seeks the importance of experience, memories, and sites through a sensuous lens. It brings attention to driving, aesthetics and garages, and the mechanisms that allow the enchantment to happen but also how it creates networks within the *raggare*. Moreover, it touches upon the challenges that *raggare* face for the future of the subculture.

The thesis ends with a conclusion where I summarise the central theoretical and methodological approaches that has been used throughout the research and revisits the aims and research questions to answer my findings with an analysis of the ethnography. The conclusion also contributes with a personal reflection of *raggarbilar* and their ability to enchant people, as well as some ideas for future research.

2. Background

Before discussing the theoretical and methodological considerations for this thesis, I will present a historical overview of the *raggar* subculture in Sweden to give some context of what *raggare* and the *raggar* subculture is about. It is difficult to pinpoint a definition of what *raggare* entails that is comfortable for everyone, and the use of the word can be very subjective. For instance, a *raggare* seldom calls themselves *raggare* yet is labelled by others as *raggare*, distinguished in the eyes of others by the vehicles they drive, which is also how I tend to define *raggare* when I see them on the streets. As Erland Rynell problematizes, how *raggare* are framed limits the community and raises the question whether we should speak of them as a lifestyle or something beyond that (1981: 63). “Bilburen ungdom”¹ indicates a group of young people socializing through their cars, is an alternative description of *raggare* that emphasizes yet also naturalizes the car by not adding certain connotations of how one should look or act. Putting these issues aside, I will give a brief overview of how the subculture emerged in Sweden.

2.1 *Raggare*: A Historical Overview

The *raggar* subculture is a unique Swedish-Finnish-Norwegian phenomenon. Even though much of the culture and its 1950s aesthetics comes from the United States, a country that was looked up to as a hero and liberator after World War II among the Swedish youth in the post-war era (Berglind 2005), there is no comparable subculture in America, thus the community was developed in a very local manner (O’Dell 1997). *Raggare* traditionally describes someone trying to pick up girls on the street with their cars (“att ragga upp”) but older etymologies point to different dialectical varieties, such as “to collect” (e.g., a truck driver collecting goods at work), to be “unpolished” or “to drive a bad car” (Bergling 2005: 39). Hence *raggare* has become associated with a mix of the former definitions yet is today linked with people who are enthusiastic about *raggarbilar* – that is, the cars.

There are many different types of *raggare* as the subculture crosses generational boundaries, hence it is not a purely coherent group in terms of age, cultural and territorial background (Åhlström 2009). Since the subculture is cross-boundary in many aspects, there are many subcategories of *raggare*. Erling Bjurström (1990: 208-210) has developed a table to describe the different types of *raggare*, among them we find cruising cars which involve classic cars,

¹ Directly translated as ‘car borne youth.’

racing cars, vans and cabs, hot-rods, customary built cars, modified cars and “skitraggare/blöjraggare”² or EPA tractors which are modified passenger cars. The subcultural divisions are thereby classified by the cars the people drive, which most commonly are tied to age differences – the younger generation tend to go for cheaper car options, while the elders might have owned a vintage car for decades. Despite these internal dissimilarities, the various subgroups of *raggare* join together at car cruises and car festivals. The biggest event in Sweden has taken place annually since 1978 in Västerås at Power Big Meet with roughly 20 000 national and international visitors (Big Meet 2020).

The subculture was first developed in Stockholm in the 1950s among the working-class youth when the Swedish economy was booming in the post-war period. The youth became a power of purchase when they had decent salaries and were able to consume more, thus youngsters could afford their own car and a new market aiming towards younger people was developed (Bjurström 1980: 51-54). Globally, the car became a key turning point for modern society, and a sign for national economic standards. Sweden during this time was a rather homogenous society with a functionalist approach of one’s way of being, meaning that traditional and utilitarian values were emphasized by the establishment (cf. O’Dell 2001). This view was challenged by the younger generation at the time. Influences of individualization and self-expression from the United States started to arise among the Swedish youth and was much inspired by American popular culture such as the works of American beatnik author Jack Kerouac (2016 [1957]), and the movie *American Graffiti*³ (Lucas 1973). In Sweden, *raggare* during this era became a pop cultural phenomenon with the movie *Raggare!* (Hellbom 1959) and depicted in Swedish literature by Birgitta Stenberg (see: Stenberg 1963) among many other authors. The urge for self-expression was very much reflected through the cars. The car, and especially the American car, thus became an artwork and identity marker for individuals who were inspired by the American cultural expressions along with the 1950s clothing style (Eyerman & Löfgren 1995). It was the beginning of customized cars that showed individualistic performance on the roads (Bell 2008) which the middle-class did not show much appreciation for.

Nonetheless, because of the liberal self-expression, the *raggar* community was quickly described as rebellious and even dangerous by the older generation. Conflicts with the police, fights with other subcultural groups such as punk rockers, and sexual encounters considered

² Directly translated to “shitty *raggare*” and “diaper *raggare*” which indicates a younger person who drives for example a trashy-looking Volvo 740. See also *pilsnerraggare* in glossary.

³ The Swedish title of the movie is “*Sista natten med gänget*.”

subversive at the time, led to negative media coverage of *raggare*. The worry of the sexual encounters resulted in an investigation in 1962 named *Raggarutredningen* which intended to act on “the girl problem” and prevent women from getting ill-treated or raped by men, which the authorities assumed was happening in the cars (Bergling 2005). Additionally, the Swedish romanticized image of the United States came to a decline with the protests of the Vietnam war that started in 1965 and American artefacts became alternatively associated with ‘bad taste’ which impacted the gaze on *raggare* (O’Dell 2001). For me, I have experienced this understanding of *raggare*; as a kitsch hobby for those in small cities, something for people to cringe at rather than be seriously interested in. In this way, the reputation of *raggare* is not as atrocious as it once was but has continually been underappreciated and neglected.

Despite the troublesome history and ill-presented image of *raggare*, the subculture has lived on somewhat stably throughout the years (Bjurström 1980: 115-116, 141-142), with few adjustments to contemporary societal trends. From once being active on the streets of Stockholm, today it is most common to see *raggare* in smaller towns or in the countryside. The fashionable aspects of the subculture have differed, and the aesthetic preferences of the cars vary from person to person. Notwithstanding, the car is still core to the culture. Despite its vibrant and strong on-going communal spirit, the subculture has not been in the academic eye for many years except for a few books on popular culture of the general history of *raggare* (see: Bergling 2005, Åhlström 2009) and a small portion of Bachelor and Master theses that have touched upon, for example, the identity making among female *raggare* (Rydberg 2019) and how social problems of *raggare* were perceived in the past and its way forward (Anderson & Danforth 2009).

While the world around *raggare* has alternated, these people have continued their shared passion for *raggarbilar* and American culture from the mid-1900s. As I have been told, the feeling of driving is still as special for them as the first time they went for a car ride in their adolescence and the social aspects of the cars keep the community from dissolving, as I demonstrate below in my ethnographic sections.

3. Theoretical Approach

The car is in many ways low-hanging fruit for anthropologists, specifically those interested in material culture. Its relationship to cultural and social life is complex, making it odd that it has received very little attention until recently as an object of research. Material culture and materiality is where I base my theoretical understanding in this thesis. This approach stresses the relational aspects of how materials affect humans, society, and culture. Within anthropology, Daniel Miller (2001; 2005) has been the most outspoken on the need of materiality and car cultural studies thus he has been an influential source for my understanding on how to study cars as material objects and especially through his concept of *the humanity of the car*. This is followed in this section by Alfred Gell's (1992; 1998) work on enchantment and 'social agency' as a possible theoretical explanation on what it is about cars that draws the *raggarr* subculture together, hence they are being enchanted by a two-way-mediated relationship. But first, I will give an overview of previous studies on cars.

3.1 Literary Overview on Cars: The Humanity of the Car

A world without cars is very difficult to imagine. No matter where in the world we are, they are to be seen. If we think about the earth from a bird's eye view, we will see thousands of cars driving on the streets and roads, connecting cities to the countryside, roundabouts and traffic lights that help to organize the traffic smoothly, garages and parking lots occupying great areas of land. Cars and infrastructure are essential in the modern landscape as well as being symbols of modern life, used to transport us to friends, to work, to shops and beyond, thus it is a dominant and taken for granted way of transporting oneself.

However, cars are more than a vehicle for transportation: cars are culturally embedded in everyday practices and thus impact humans, society, and nature. The car shapes the day-to-day negotiations of drivers, affecting behaviors in social, ethical, and cognitive aspects (Maxwell 2001). The driver-car hybrid recognizes an assemblage of social connotations (Dant 2004), impacting each other and moreover. In other words, there is a supposedly mundane relationship that requires more consideration (Lemonnier 2013).

Despite this cultural significance, cars have been taken for granted and not received as much attention as they deserve within either anthropology or sociology. Sociology, for example, has called for a greater attention to car studies, but their examinations have focused on the concept of 'automobility' that describes the social impacts of cars, driving and traffic and how it together

produces social behaviors (see: Urry 2000; 2006). Even though this view includes many important components to the hybrid of the car-driver, *automobility* is weak when it comes to adding as many angles as possible in search of going beyond the driver and the car (cf. Dant 2004, Sayre 2020). This could include missing out on other forms of mobility (see: Böhm, et. al. 2006) or difficulties to explain bodily embodiment while driving (see: Dawson 2017b). Additionally, Urry and other sociologists in favor of the concept have been criticized for its postcolonial outlook when discussing the concept as a process of modernization, believing that it will follow the same path outside a Western hemisphere (Sayre 2020: 129-130). This is where the anthropological eye can be a supporting complement in understanding the culture around cars by focusing on small-scale ethnographic cases that are not limited to Westernized perspectives. While this study is within a Western context, I put emphasis on the small-scale anthropological ethnography of this research, and I hope to bring notions of materiality and the senses that can be understood and theorized in a wider context.

Daniel Miller has been the most outspoken about the importance of studying the car, shown clearly in the anthology *Car Cultures* (2001). As anthropologists have been working in the field, cars have been significant for the execution of the fieldwork yet rarely have they been the anthropologist's central concern. In the book, Miller and his co-authors explore how relationships to cars are developed and aim to go beyond the previous focal point of view which has been on historical and environmental aspects of cars (Miller 2001: 5-6). Rather, they want to reconcile the car with cultural expression in anthropology. In Southern Australia for example, the car is such an essential part of the Ananugu Aboriginal society that rituals surrounding the car occur in their cultural practice (Young 2001) where the car "has become more a means to resist alienation than a sign of alienation" (Miller 2001: 3). Another example of the Aboriginal culture that is raised in *Car Cultures* is how gender, race and power play out through the Toyota car among the Warlpiris (Stotz 2001). Further, the perspectives of how to perceive cars are highlighted among those we find in Jojada Verrips and Birgit Meyer's (2001) study of dead cars in Ghana. With these examples, it is clear that intersectional analysis through cars can yield interesting results, where, through paying attention to the material culture, different aspects of culture and subcultures become clear, which I will show in my ethnographic encounters.

Miller uses the concept of *the humanity of the car* that deals with cars beyond their physicality and the cultural and social significance that follows. He writes that:

“(…) the humanity of the car must imply a perspective that examines the car as a vehicle for class, oppression, racism and violence, all evident products of our humanity. The car’s humanity lies not just in what people are able to achieve through it, nor yet in its role as a tool of destruction, but in the degree to which it has become *an integral part of the cultural environment within which we see ourselves as humans.*” (Miller 2001: 2, my emphasis)

He emphasizes the problem of taking cars for granted and the many social implications that are embedded in cars. By providing anthropological perspectives, he and the co-authors provide some tools for how to think about the cars’ impact on both mundane and integral bases. Gordon M. Sayre (2020), too, has used the humanity of the car notion to highlight embodiment processes between cars and humans and the humanization of cars, but deliberate further on the issues of post-humanistic ideas inspired by post-humanist scholars, such as Donna Haraway’s essay *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991). In Sayre’s example, the car fully controls human lives closer to a master-slave relationship which he believes goes too far away from the core of agency in this matter. To his understanding, the concept is simply “(…) an everyday practice and reaches from the local and mundane to the global and spectacular” (Sayre: 138).

Indeed, if we study cars through Miller’s concept of *the humanity of the car*, we get closer to an understanding of the meaning-making of cars for humans and societies. Whilst I do not touch upon issues of class, oppression, racism, or violence, even though it is an interesting and tempting impulse, I have rather used the concept in terms of the humanization aspects of the cars – how it is integral to the cultural landscape, how the cars can impact on people, become human-like for their owners and how these features create companionship. Cars, too, can create a sensation of extension of oneself, both physically and emotionally, which is what I will discuss later in the method section when addressing how I have used sensuous elements on cars. But firstly, I will go deeper into the theoretical outline of material culture, its historical development, and recent debates I have used to address cars.

3.2 Material Culture

Material culture is a theoretical and methodological subfield within anthropology that analyses the complex relationships between objects and people within certain cultural contexts and how things can shape society – cars, then, and their cultural significance is perfectly matched with the field of material culture. It allows the scholar to understand the impact of objects and artefacts, and how it affects, acts, and provokes our perceptions and the surrounding

environment on a cultural level. For anthropologists, material culture challenges bounded holistic claims and expands attention beyond the confines of people alone – providing greater perspectives on a small-scale level to understand how objects, artefacts and materials create cultural significance for one another (Eglash 2006).

Another important aspect for the anthropologist to consider is the historical notion of how artefacts from indigenous societies have been distinguished as exotic and less valued compared to Western cultures. From being a subfield that in the beginning stressed the evolutionary differences and advances of materials, and especially technology (see: Morgan 1978 [1877]; White 1943) by comparing the advances of the so-called ‘primitive’ societies with ostensibly the ‘superior’ Western societies, to today include more complex outcomes of social behavior, values, rituals, style, and politics. The latter has been examined by anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Marcel Mauss, even though they did not name their study of interest ‘material culture’ at the time. Malinowski described in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) how the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands risked their lives to give gifts to other islanders in exchange for political authority. This was later developed by Marcel Mauss’ *The Gift* (1977 [1925]) into reciprocity, a non-market that is based on the socially obligatory exchange of goods and services yet on the premise that it is necessary for social institutions and bonds to stay culturally continuous. These are illustrative examples of how materials in this sense create significance for maintaining social relations, creating norms, routines, and cultural bonds that one follows.

What is crucial to distinguish within the field is the theoretical difference between ‘material’ and ‘materiality’. Scholars like Daniel Miller (2005) and Christopher Tilley (2007) stress the social significance of *materiality* while those in favor of *material* point to the desire to include a greater spectrum of what materials entail. The latter suggests that one ought to consider the core meaning of materials, hence going back to the full process of the object – from its raw material to a finished product – so that the craftsmanship of the object can be fully acknowledged. Tim Ingold (2007), who is a key spokesperson for the *material* concept, believes that *materiality* becomes too abstract when not taking a whole chain of actions into account, hence it leaves out crucial issues one ought to address to fully discern an object. For example, Ingold argues that *materiality* focuses directly on objects from a consumptive level and therefore forgets many momentous steps of how material once occurred. This view is closely linked to ecological anthropology as Ingold (2012) argues that both fields are seeking relations between human-objects much like material culture does. On the other hand, *materiality* underlies human impact, how it creates relations, as well as the complexity of social and

historical hierarchy of objects, why some objects are perceived as more important than others. Thus, it tells us about the social life and significance of materials themselves, which cannot be missed by material culture, as it is the central focus of it (Tilley 2006; 2007).

Another notion of material culture is actor-network theory which seeks the *social agency* of objects and, similar to Ingold's argument, tries to explain the relational symmetry between human-objects. A common example is Bruno Latour's illustration of human-gun relation which he describes as a technical mediation where the person holding a gun is affected by the object to operate in a way he or she might not have expected. In other words, the human-object relation is one where they transform each other and therefore they should not be distinguished by their power over one another (Latour 1994). A further case of human extension is Latour's example of speed bumps in which he describes as a sleeping policeman that helps the police force to have more control over the traffic as well as causing the drivers to act more carefully. This in turn creates a whole range of actions that affects humans and society – from saving lives on the roads to hospital expenses – all because of a speed bump (*ibid.*: 1994). A third case is the technological features inside the cars, among those are seatbelt notifications, that impacts the behaviors of the drivers (Latour 1992: 152). In sum, Latour wishes not to separate subject-object relations as they are impacting each other in multiple ways while also emphasizing the agency of objects. However, Latour has on the other hand been criticized for leaving out multiple relations and for not seeing human and non-human relations from a multifaceted perspective (Dant 2004: 16-18; Miller 2005: 12).

The social and cultural aspects of cars go beyond the car into something bigger than one can imagine. Miller writes about the socialization process of artefacts as a form-of-being in the world, where the meanings and significance of things are culturally embedded with individual and societal perceptions, as well as in embodied processes (Miller 1993). That is what I focus upon: while both Ingold and Latour set out many interesting and crucial aspects to address in terms of relational actions and agency of objects, I will continue with Miller and Tilley's emphasis for *materiality* because, in this study, the question of social significance is *enhanced* rather than a wholly material process. Tilley argues that material processes are objectively interpreted and changes from material to material, hence, it is difficult to claim that people's interaction with objects can be a *full* process if we do not consider the complex subject-object relation it entails (Tilley 2007: 17-18). Miller asserts that artefacts have tended to be hierarchical in their significance which consequently creates a taken for granted consciousness around some objects thus also impacting their social significance (Miller 1993). Preferably, he argues the physicality and humility of ordinary artefacts are key areas to address when speaking

of their meaningfulness as we try to understand their underlying cultural and social implications. Such an example could be Susanne Küchler's (2002) study of *malaggan* sculptures in Melanesia – artefacts that has been highly treasured in museums worldwide yet not scrutinized for their underlying meanings and relations. Another example is Tim Dant's (2005) in-depth analysis of interactions between person-object, in this case the mundane relation between car-technicians and how tools are shaping and embodying individuals and objects. Thus, the physical presence of taken for granted objects, such as cars, have more power on human awareness than one apprehends (Miller 2005) and therefore this perspective is helpful to understand the *raggar* culture.

One way to approach the problem of hierarchy of artefacts is to relate the physicality of the material to aesthetics, to theorize what makes some cars an attractive site of subcultural expression and fascination. Next, I will relate this issue to Alfred Gell's (1992) concept of *the technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology* to understand how materials as art pieces can be understood.

3.3 The Technology of Enchantment and The Enchantment of Technology

Back in 1972, Roland Barthes compared the magical features of cars to Gothic cathedrals, writing that they are: “almost the exact equivalent (...). I mean the supreme creation of an era, conceived with passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not usage by the whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object” (1972: 88). This quote is reflecting on the God given features of cars: their shapes, lines, smoothness – all built up by their construction and assemblages, while combined creates a perfected piece of material for the human being to prospect on a spiritual level. The car, in this interpretation, is a one-way communication between the spirit of the human and the material substances provoking such emotions.

Alfred Gell (1992) proposes a contrasting two-way relationship to how art objects imprint on human consciousness: through a process of technical enchantment. As Gell writes, anthropology is standing in the way of aesthetic analysis and needs to surrender its stance of art and aesthetics because it is difficult to address art without concerning its ethnocentrism. Previous studies on art and aesthetics have failed to leave the hierarchical ideology of perception and function on objects by following Kantian principles of judgments of taste which describe the universality of beauty being applicable to everyone through reason (Kant 2007 [1790]). Yet, this notion is unsuccessful to show cross-cultural applicability outside a Western

context when the perception of aesthetics is not appreciated equally (Sharman 1997, Gell 1998). Art can be compared to religion in which it captivates people and produces emotional responses, but for anthropologists to be able to demystify art, we ought to understand how some art objects are considered more fascinating than others. This is where the Gellian two-way communication of enchantment comes into play. He writes:

“The power of art objects stems from the technical processes they objectively embody: the technology of enchantment is founded on the enchantment of technology. The enchantment of technology is the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form. Art, as a separate kind of technical activity, only carries further, through a kind of involution, the enchantment which is immanent in all kinds of technical activity” (Gell 1992: 44).

Thus, *the enchantment of technology and the technology of enchantment* is in a manner of speaking the tool for artists to mesmerize the audience through the objects or artefact’s craftsmanship, its aesthetics and symbolic value and in that way manages to transfix the observer. The Gellian approach explains how some art pieces are more enchanting than others – it moves away from simple meaning-making and symbolism and focuses rather on the objectiveness and what people do with the object in question. Art is a good example of how this process occurs and how certain objects impact societies and its collectives on unexplainable levels. By exemplifying with Kula canoes, Gell explains how the artistic appearance of the canoes were made to impress the people who saw them as well as to signal prestige and power, thus casting a spell (Gell 1992.: 44-46, 56). As a result, the magic of the object is within the object and the process in itself is unexplainable yet still manages to amaze those who interact with it.

This is the psychological process between the artist and the viewer, but Gell also develops this notion further by addressing the *social agency* of art pieces. For example, religious artefacts have the power of idolatry, meaning that the affection one can feel towards a religious art piece is because of the agency of the object. It does not matter if it is animate or inanimate because of the belief that the religious person has become alive through the *social agency* it contains through for example the eyes of a God-picturing replica because of its inherent power that affects people (Gell 1998: 96-156).

Bringing this notion to automobiles, the design and aesthetics of cars also have the power of enchanting people. Gordon M. Sayre (2020) highlights the designer point of view when

discussing the apprehension of cars. He exemplifies the facial design, the human-like attributes, and the consciousness of cars to impact the car customer, which I will show later in the ethnographic chapters how these types of assets influence on *raggare*'s perception to their cars. Thus, the concept of *the humanity of the car* accompanies the post-humanist approach to materiality and, in the context of subcultural theory, something beyond a simple means of transportation. The car-driver hybrid affects each other in multidirectional ways – not only for reasons of physicality and aesthetics but also cultural levels as earlier described. Miller (2009) also brings the seduction of aesthetics to taxi drivers in Jamaica on a rather individual level when discussing the cultural role and function of taxis both in a societal way but also regarding how the car persuades the drivers to make aesthetic changes which impact on the individual's confidence. Thus, cars have the ability to put a spell on humans through its agency – artefacts ability to act and impact – much like religious artefacts impact on a religious person yet also being able to transform individuals in unexpected directions.

I propose to expand on Gell's theoretical approach of technological enchantment and *social agency* to not only include the mediation between the artwork and the viewer, but also add how sensory elements impacts on how materials are perceived and affecting people, thus providing an understanding of how, in this case, cars develop social relations through material means. I believe that Gell loses an important component by not addressing the notion of senses and that is why I initiate my own concept of *the sensory enchantment of materiality* which I will elaborate on more in the methodology section. By adding a sensuous perspective to Gell's enchantment and *social agency*, we can with greater ability grasp materialistic matters' impact on human beings and its surroundings.

4. Methodology

In this section, I start off by presenting what sensory methodology entails, how it has been used and why I found it particularly suiting for my studies on cars. Using the body as a source for knowledge and perception provides innovative outlooks on anthropological matters and I will here show how this notion can be carried out within a material cultural lens. Furthermore, I explain how enchantment can be connected to materiality and sensuality by providing my own concept of *the sensory enchantment of materiality* which is influenced by *the technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology* first initiated by Alfred Gell (1992), as earlier explained. After that, I go on discussing the practicalities of the method by describing the field sites, how I conducted interviews and how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted my research. I then deliberate on my use of photography and video as a tool for documentation, representation, and interaction with the interlocutors. The chapter ends with a discussion on positionality where my upbringing and network within the *raggar* community has provided the thesis with an autoethnographic angle.

4.1 Sensory Methodology

Paul Stoller (1989) has argued that anthropologists have disconnected the significance of human senses during field work, thus a great spectrum of textural culture has been missed out while doing ethnography. He draws on the five senses – taste, touch, hearing, smell, and sight – and how they connect interlocutors and the anthropologist to the field. Stoller highlights the need to consider bodily experiences to epistemologically interpret the world around us (Stoller 1997). Since then, a larger number of books and articles have been published on the topic, although it is still a field that ought to be explored more. Perhaps most pedagogical is Sarah Pink's *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2015) where she shows how body perceptions can be an innovative tool to explore the surrounding environment while doing fieldwork and challenges the anthropologist to rethink how sensorial research can be conducted practically. She argues that senses are interconnected with the field, for the interlocutors as well as the researcher, and that there are many layers of sensory thinking and experience to be explored. Stoller argues in the book *Embodying Colonial Memories* that “embodiment is not primarily textual: rather, the sentient body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds, and tastes, all of which trigger social memories” (Stoller 1995: 7). Similarly Pink argues that we must go beyond the textual to find tacit expressions and knowledge through the body.

The sensuous scholarship is very much influenced by French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty who stressed the correlation between body and knowledge, and how phenomenological perception creates consciousness of how one interprets the world. The body and the senses are then a source for judgement and taste of the surrounding environment in which neither empiricism nor rationalism are enough to explain perception. Instead, logical reasoning and sensation are part of a process that gives meaning to objects and phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty 2012 [1945]). Correspondingly, Ingold argues that senses cannot be seen as separate activities as “they are just different facets of the same activity: that of the whole organism in its environment” (Ingold 2000: 261).

Carrying out a sensory methodology within studies on material culture is not too unfamiliar yet previous studies have been keener to focus on the phenomenology of material and how it impacts social and cultural life. Senses and cars have also been rather understudied, where the main focal point has been on sight, thus creating a hierarchy of senses while driving (Dawson 2015: 8; cf. Urry 2006). This is certainly not the case, as I have learnt, and it is very unfortunate for scholars to ignore the attempt to understand the other sensuous elements that are also fundamental for relational experiences with cars. Another attempt to scrutinize cars impact on human senses is the documentary *I'm in Love with my Car* (Mellara & Rossi 2017), which focuses on consumer habits such as how drive-ins have affected human's eating habits and how the construction of cars ought to be appealing for the consumer's eye and touch, thus, the directors have a refreshing view on how the senses can be understood by adding consumption as a theoretical viewpoint.

Andrew Dawson urges for a more engaged ethnography of driving that goes beyond ‘the good feeling’ of driving (2017b). The experience of the feeling of driving has been explored within the lowriding community⁴ (see: Taylor 2009) yet, despite engaged ethnography, scholars have not focused on the cars as sentient beings but rather as materialist objects. Dawson later develops the notion of sensuous ethnography and cars by proposing that automobility studies have been disengaged due to the Marxian thought on alienation when applied to a critique on capitalist modernity (Dawson 2017a).

While this could be a possible explanation to the lacking literature, what I want to highlight in this thesis is what corresponds with Sarah Pink (2015): that senses and phenomenology ought not be separated. The sensuous elements together evoke memories, present experiences of the

⁴ Lowrider is referring to a car-based culture originally from California. Lowriders are customized automobiles with a lowered body, hence the name. Another name is ‘jumpcar’ because of the cars modified ability to jump, or ‘dance’.

cars as well as imaginings of what cars could be like. Through a sensuous perspective, I have aimed to explore how one can understand *raggarbilar* and how the corporeal experience of the car creates embodied social connections thus, bringing a whole subculture together which I wish to demonstrate this through my attempt at sensory ethnographic engagement.

Furthermore, I have scrutinized by own bodily experience when I have been driving as well as when I have been nearby the cars to get a better understanding of sensuous perceptions to cars. This will be reflected in the vignettes of each chapter, where I lay out my own personal bond to cars and how my perception changes throughout the fieldwork – all because of a closer sensory engagement with the cars. Despite not having the opportunity to do passenger-seat ethnography (cf. Dawson 2017b, Laurier et al. 2008) as well as having more access to sight as a sensory component throughout the fieldwork, I still hope to show cars as sentient phenomena through interviews and participant observations that were conducted in the garages. By initiating my own concept of *the sensory enchantment of materiality* that I will introduce next, I hope to give clarity on the blank spots of sensuous thinking with cars in this study.

4.2 The Sensory Enchantment of Materiality

As earlier mentioned, sensory perspectives on cars still have many gaps to be filled out with new research, as it has not been explored adequately despite being a multi-sensorial object that impacts everyone daily and, in this manner, brings meaning-making to people in different ways. The effects and the sensory impact of materials have been intertwined in previous research (see: Gosden 2005) but, to my knowledge, never conceptualized.

In this study, I have come across several perspectives on how the body, senses and phenomenology can be interpreted through cars. Thus, there is an important interplay between theory and method, cars-humans, and especially in the case of cars-raggare as this relationship also bring up issues of aesthetics, memories, and imaginations as well as space as crucial components to understand how the subculture creates social connections. Hence, to grasp cars as sentient objects and how they affect the drivers, I have applied Alfred Gell's *technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology* (1992) as well as his notion of two-way communication between art and the viewer (1998) melding it together with sensory methodology, and I have developed the concept of *the sensory enchantment of materiality* to analyze the relationship between senses and materiality. In that way, I hope to avoid an ocular centrism that values the visual (van Ede 2009) and instead manage to grasp a greater spectrum of all senses in relation to the materiality of an object.

In the case of *raggare*, as we will see, the sound of the engine, the stylish look of the cars, and the feeling of driving are just some of the aspects that have been described as enchanting for the *raggare* I have met. The sensuous aspect is also linked with the memories of the cars and the place where *raggare* and the cars interact with each other. Thus, cars just like art can call upon potent emotional responses that are stronger among some people than others. These responses can be shared between people, and the sensuous experience of the materiality is, what I believe, what connects *raggare*. I argue that this concept helps to understand the meaning-making of materiality and how the senses have an influential part on how objects can persuade human. Therefore, I believe and hope my expansion of Gell's theoretical outlook will help to analyze not only car materiality but also other sensuous objects in the subject matter of material cultural studies.

4.3 Field Site, Interview Method and Doing Fieldwork During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Sarah Pink stresses the importance of place and space when conducting a sensory methodology to comprehend someone else's world and how they experience their surroundings (Pink 2015: 25- 50). The sensory interrelationship between body-mind-environment gives an understanding of how humans are impacted by its material surroundings. In turn, phenomenology and perception can be understood through place and space. While studying other people's senses and experiences is a challenge in itself (van Ede 2009), the field becomes a valuable source as place and space are part of "the process of demonstrating the physical connection of researcher and text with place has remained of prime importance to the [anthropological] discipline" (Coleman and Collins 2006: 1). Hence, the space and the ethnographic encounter in this way becomes a theory (Nader 2011).

For this study, the *raggar*-car relation is studied in garages to understand how the two parts are being embodied. The field sites I have visited were in different garages in Västernorrland county in central Sweden. One was a rented shared garage in central Örnsköldsvik where my father and his friends meet up every Wednesday evening for some coffee and to chat about cars and life. Two garages were motor based clubs: the first one named the Swedish Hot Rod Association⁵ (SHRA) in Örnsköldsvik, and the second one was Coast League Cruisers (CLC) in Ullånger which is located approximately 40 minutes south of Örnsköldsvik. Additionally, I visited some of my informants in their private garages to conduct interviews, take photos of

⁵ SHRA is a national association for motor sports that originally intended to bring drag racing drivers together but today includes all types of vehicles.

their cars and record audio representations to get a better grasp of their vehicles as well as the garage as a sensory environment. In this way, I hoped to get as close as possible to a sensory understanding of the car's materiality and the interaction between the interlocutors and the cars (Dant 2005), as well as its aural soundscape in relation to the cars in an attempt to show how it is integral to the theory, method and field (Samuels et al. 2010).

Additionally, the physical and online interviews had a certain focus on sensuous perceptions, thus they have been crucial for the ethnographic material. I have interviewed ten different people: two of whom I got in contact with through Facebook groups, and the remaining eight were friends of my parents.⁶ Two of the interviews were made collectively: the first with two of my interlocutors in CLC, and the second with a father and daughter in their garage. Not all participants are mentioned by their names and one person requested to be anonymous, yet their responses during the interviews have been used to back up the ethnographic material. Each interview was approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes long which gave me a significant amount of material to work with and they are the main material for this research. The online interviews and those performed in garages were semi-structured, meaning that the questions were prepared but also asked according to the topic that was brought up during the talks to go deeper into certain issues (Skinner 2013: 2-5). However, focusing on bodily experience through interviews means that the researcher can never get full access to the other person's perspective and thus, needs to use certain techniques such as video devices to get a grasp of someone else's phenomenological experiences (Gore et. al. 2013: 127-139). In the next section, I will deliberate more on this issue and how I have used visual instruments to add an understanding of my informant's sensory experience.

A particular difficulty has been how to interpret sensory expression while having interviews through Zoom or Skype. In those talks, I could neither see the persons as they chose to have their cameras off, nor get any photographs or audio recordings of their vehicles. Alternatively, I have endeavored to listen to their way of talking about their cars – mainly through their intonations and dialectical expressions – their experiences, and thoughts through a sensory engagement with the transcribed interviews (O'Dell and Willim 2013) in order to grasp this aspect.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Public Health Agency of Sweden's national guidelines to keep distance and stay at home as much as possible to prevent the spread of the virus (Folkhälsomyndigheten 2021), it was a great struggle to conduct a 'traditional'

⁶ To clarify from an ethical standpoint: all names of interlocutors and places mentioned throughout the thesis are made in agreement with interlocutors' wishes.

anthropological fieldwork. As the spread of the virus became more intense in Sweden during the second wave in the autumn of 2020, less of my key informants appeared at my field sites hence I have not done as much ‘thick description’ – to borrow Clifford Geertz’ (1973) concept – as I had originally intended, and the interviews have been what I could rely on the most during the fieldwork. Furthermore, a preferred timeline would have been during the summer months when normally there are many *raggar* based car events occurring and I would have been able to do more passenger-seat ethnography, however this would not have changed much for the year 2020 when many events were cancelled. Before starting the fieldwork, I expected to see people working on the cars, but quickly realized that due to restrictions that was impossible. Nonetheless, drinking coffee and having hour-long chats in the garages were still valuable as they provided interactions with my interlocutors that has given me insightful data.

Despite many unexpected outcomes and difficulties during the fieldwork period, I have tried my best to balance the ethnographic material with the interviews in this thesis and managing to find many interesting and unique perspectives on how cars are sentient objects to people. The research would most probably have been different under other circumstances – during summertime or in a time without a global pandemic. However, I believe that my meetings with *raggare* off-season have been beneficial for my study because I got to see a close interaction with *raggare* and their intimate moments with their cars in the garages. Also, my previous experience, knowledge, and access to the subculture provided me with a base understanding that another researcher may not have had, hence I got an ever-better ground than I possibly could have asked for.

4.4 Visual Representation

Previous studies on cars have used audio recordings to engage in automobile cultures. Eric Laurier (2010) for example, has recorded and transcribed the conversations of drivers in their cars to get an understanding for the ethnographer of what is happening inside the cars without the presence of a human observer. Using a visual instrument for ethnographic purposes thus highlights aspects of the environment and the people in the field that otherwise could get lost. Sarah Pink stresses the gains of how visual methods can evoke a closer understanding of multisensorial elements and the interconnectedness of the body-material environment (Pink 2009: 97-116). This, too, translates to the ethnographer as an integral process that stretches from the body of the photographer to the people being observed. Furthermore, David MacDougall (2006) similarly argues that an ethnographer that uses visual instruments in the

field gets a closer engagement to the informant's environment. In that sense, the visual helps to support sensorial commitments in the field rather than being a pure representation of the senses. Comparing Rasmus Rodineliussen's (2017) study of sensorial ethnography within the scuba diver community and the benefits of visual methods, I interpret this notion to both a closer engagement as well as an adaptation to the field. In the case of *raggare*, photography and video are highly present as an essential component in the culture as photos and videos of the cars are illustrative for the subculture to share with each other.

I have been inspired by Andrew Irving (2013), who let pedestrians record themselves while expressing their thoughts during walks over bridges in New York. He explores the corporeal relationship between senses, emotions, and the urban landscape of Manhattan. Similarly, I have tried to compromise with the lacking mobility of the cars during my time in the field by using my camera to highlight the aspects of the cars that my informants believe are the most important parts of their vehicles. These are both audio recordings of starting their engines and the sounds inside the garages, as well as photography which is the greatest amount of visual representation that will be shown in this thesis.⁷ I have not taken any photos of my informants due to their unwillingness to be photographed; instead, I let the photos and videos of the cars be representations of my interlocutors, as well as the garage environment, as I see the two as part of the embodiment process that I will discuss further in the ethnography chapters. The pictures can be interpreted as corporal images of *the sensory enchantment of materiality* and in this way the cars become interlocutors in their own way. MacDougall's call for the need of visual anthropology as the visual is always present for the anthropologists (2006: 227-229), and similarly I call for the importance of material visuality in material culture studies. Additionally, Rose and Tolia-Kelly (2012) urge a new way of thinking – a manifesto for practice – on how the visual and material communicate and intertwine, and I am hoping to show how the material and the visual can be combined.

4.5 Stefan's Daughter – An Autoethnographic Encounter on Positionality

This research has its foundation and inspiration from my own upbringing in the car centered subculture of *raggare*, and thus the study has an autoethnographic angle. Autoethnographic studies are when the researcher scrutinizes cultural experiences based on his/her own personal

⁷ Despite not having too many video recordings, I made a YouTube channel with my audio representations to give an insight to some of the sounds that are present within the *raggar* culture, which can be found through this link: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLOc6kASvP_5j3XqerBocRHKuyAIXARIIv

experiences. By using a ‘writing down’ perspective – meaning going back to oneself – the writer aims to draw how such contexts can be applied to a bigger picture of the world hence a tool to ‘write up’ (Atkinson 1990). Accordingly, it is a self-reflecting task and, indeed, this study has been a personal investigation of why my family has a great passion for cars while I have never taken any interest in it myself but rather distanced myself from the culture. I will reflect on this matter in my concluding remarks.

There are many benefits of writing autoethnographically. To start, it offers a personal insight to a field that one might not otherwise encounter and by using self-reflexivity as a tool for expression, it is a unique way of conducting fieldwork (Aull Davies 2008: 178-189). Further, accessibility to informants and the field sites I have been visiting might not have been possible for someone who does not have the same network. In this regard, my stance as an insider to the field has been very beneficial.

Nonetheless, there are also many important issues that one needs to address. For example, entering a field that one has a personal insight into can also lead to blindness as the researcher might take things happening around him or her taken for granted while someone with an outsider perspective would take interest in. While studying ‘the other’ is already a problematic task for the anthropologist (Smith 2012; Clifford & Marcus 1986), having an autoethnographic angle makes it even more crucial to be aware of the issues on how to approach the people in the field. For my own study, the integrity of my interlocutors, who are friends of my parents, has been an ethical consideration – both to not underestimate or take their stories for granted and how my interference as a student making a study about their relationships to cars and each other could impact on their relationship to my parents.

Another difficulty which made my position lean rather on the outsider spectrum was my position as a Master’s student – this, in combination with being “*Stefan’s daughter*” – which oftentimes I sensed that the people I met in the garages were doing a favor for my father by participating in my study. At first, few were sincerely interested to take part in the research and expressed concern and intimidation of what a Master’s thesis entails, so in this way being an academic in a working class-based environment created particular boundaries. On that matter, I had to work on building up trust with my informants for them to feel comfortable around me and my notepad. These barriers rather put me on a in/outsider spectrum (cf. Sattari 2018; Lal 1996), as I had pre-visioned assumptions of what the field would be like yet faced many difficulties to reach the subject as such. However, I argue that my position on the outsider spectrum allowed this research to become something unique in the sense that it forced me to

scrutinize my own personal prejudices and thus, I see this as an enhancement of the study rather than an anticlimax in any way.

In many respects, this has been a collaborative study that I have accomplished together with my father. Without him, I would not have had access to my key informants and most probably I would have had very few participants overall. The ethnography that I managed to conduct was based on garage visits to friends of my father as well as participant observation during the Wednesday meetings he has with his friends. I have not used my parents as key informants because I wanted to have some personal distance as it was already a difficulty to find a balance between conducting a project as a researcher and being constantly reminded of my informant's connections to my parents. During the conversations I had with the interlocutors, their relationship to my father was brought up, and I could receive comments such as "oh god, you look just like your father!" This in turn made it troublesome to see the value of using my own upbringing as a field for anthropological research. Thanks to Adams et al. (2014: 9), I have been trying my best to view my self-experiences of a subcultural context and my family as a beneficial source for cultural knowledge and use this as another source throughout the research.

PART II – TALES ON CAR COMPANIONSHIP

5. Relationships to Cars

On my first day of fieldwork on a cold November morning, I went to *World of Classics Museum & Sales*, a vintage car museum in Tumba, located about 50 minutes from Stockholm Central. On the entrance door, there was a sign saying “Warning! *Raggar*-dense area!”. Even before stepping into the museum, I had a sense of what to expect. I called the phone number on the door and waited for someone to open it for me. I was greeted by a man who seemed surprised to see a young girl. I paid the entrance fee which includes a cup of coffee for free and another employee came out to say hello.

We started talking where I explained that my parents are engaged in the *raggar* culture and that I wanted to approach the car from a sensory angle when he said: “if you manage to capture the feeling of the car and what draws people to it, you will eventually get caught up in the culture and interest.” Nervously laughing and thinking there is no way that it will happen, I explained that I have never had much affection for the cars but rather distanced myself from them. He sighed and said: “some people are born as homosexuals; some are born with a chromosome defect, and some are born with a vintage car interest. It is something that follows you through life.” Perhaps I am not one of those who was born with *it* in that case?

After I promised to bring my family to the museum one day, he let me walk around by myself. The three floored museum was packed with approximately 100 cars embellished with vintage items, making me think of the film *Grease* (Kleiser 1978). One car had a tray hanging on the door with plastic diner food and a child-sized doll which made me imagine a family trip to McDonalds. In a corner, an Uncle Sam statue was pointing back towards the entrance door. On the walls there were several of American flags, neon signs texted with American badges and tin signs depicting Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe. From the stereo, melodies from the mid-1900s music were playing: the culture of 1950s USA had an equal presence to the cars themselves. Even ordinary everyday items have been ‘auto-morphed’ – turned into something car-related – and Americanized: an oil can had turned into a lamp base and an aquarium was filled with sand, tiny cactuses and toy cars that looked similar to the landscapes of Arizona.

Walking around the collection I was struck by how massive the cars were. At the museum, they were polished to perfection. By every car, there was an information sign which I started to read one by one but quickly realized that there was no point because I did not understand the details on the signs: when the cars were made, how they were made, and their specific types of

interior parts did not tell me much since I have no previous knowledge of such information. A couple who looked like they were on a date were walking in the parallel aisle next to me and the man showed off his knowledge for the woman by telling stories about the cars from memory. He did not need the signs. She seemed impressed and fascinated. I was wondering how long he had been into these types of cars but felt too shy to ask and interrupt their date.

Sitting down in the diner on the top floor with my cup of coffee, I started to write down my notes and scrolled through my pictures on my camera when I suddenly became aware of my own boundary to the culture: the high knowledge about the cars. The detailed information about cars has always been around me growing up – similar to a fluent car language I have never understood. Rather, this insight was intimidating. Perhaps one needs to work and spend time with the cars to appreciate such technicalities. Or possibly, as the man said to me, one needs to be born with the interest to truly understand the beauty of the cars.

Looking up at the ceiling for a moment of reflection, the light from chandeliers blinded my eyes. Lost in my thoughts and worry of how this fieldwork will work out, I suddenly heard the man in the staff I earlier spoke to singing along to Elvis Presley's 'Suspicious Minds' as he sat down with the other employees and started to discuss the 2020 American election. At this point, it seemed like Donald Trump still had a chance to win against Joe Biden.



Figure 1: Inside *World of Classics Museum & Sales*.



Figure 2: 1950s decorations to accommodate the style era of the cars.

By the time I had finished my coffee, I started to walk back to the entrance and passed by all the cars once again. The cars themselves were not scary, but rather enchanting in a place like this. Even though the museum is aimed at *raggare*, there is no doubt that this place also affects people like me. Just the fact that a human being has managed to collect all the gadgets and cars says something of how easy it is to be captivated by the culture. I am reminded by the man's words about capturing the feeling of the car and feel a slightly bigger hope that this fieldwork will turn out fine. Perhaps I need to put my boundaries aside for a while to fully appreciate what I am about to explore.

This day of ethnography was the first time I walked around American vintage cars by myself, thus it was the first time I made an honest reflection on my own personal relation to how I see and feel about American vintage cars. Despite growing up close to the cars, I have never felt much affection towards them nor the *raggare* culture, but rather resented it due to my upbringing where I longed for days that did not center around cars and cruising in them. This prejudice has impacted my connections and understandings of how to approach the subculture and the cars. For me, the cars connote high knowledge, or perhaps nerdiness, attention-seeking and a kinship that I was watching from the sidelines. However, this is only one perspective of how to approach the cars, and as we will see, *raggare* have a very different understanding of them.

In the up-coming tales, I will show different narratives of how these cars speak, act, feel, embrace, enhance, and go beyond their mere physicality. Agency, as I see as objects ability to act and impact, and anthropomorphism, known as the portraits of materials that are described as a way of socially define something that lacks information by giving them a stereotypical generalization of human-like traits which can give more or less trust to the object (Zanatto et al. 2019), are central themes in all narratives. The cars are described by my interlocutors as having human-like characteristics and, thus, creating a specific, close companionships with their owners. It is through the stories of my interlocutors that we will get a better understanding on how cars can affect people. The tales have three main interlocutors but also include other perspectives that are closely linked to the topic from my other informants.

In the first tale, I tell the story of how car agency impacts Magnus. Through his three cars, he has different experiences and perceptions that impact him as a driver and as a person but also on the subculture as a whole. *Raggarbilar* are understood as dissimilar to newer cars to my interlocutors, which give the cars a certain instrumentality unlike something else. The second tale focuses on Ulrika and how her car is a representation of herself which occurs through different ways of embodiment. The final tale also touches on anthropomorphism where my informant describes his relationship to his car as similar to one with a woman, thus it focuses on gendered materialism, partnership and losing authority of the car.

Through anthropomorphic processes, the car becomes something beyond its physicality: a friend, a partner, a family member, and a reflection of oneself, thus, also impacting on the owner of the car – thus, *the humanity of the car* through its integral impact on human and culture comes visible here. I demonstrate this, arguing that the *social agency* of the cars in these tales shows how the human-object relation is instead a two-way mediation where each impacts the other (Latour 1992; 1994, Gell 1992). In the same way, Gell (1998) points to the fact that objects are human-produced, objects with their agency also have the ability to produce people. Following is a small portion of how this transpires, where cars produce *raggare* or, more importantly, people.

5.1 The Agency of Cars – The Tale of Magnus, the Van, the Torino and the Vedette

I drove a 30-minute drive to Magnus' house, a friend of my father whom I first met in SHRA where he is renting a spot in the garage while he is working on renovating his van. At SHRA, he, my father and I had a chat over some coffee about my thesis and he immediately sounded interested in the topic. There he talked about the constant ambition to try to finish the work on his cars before Christmas so he would have a chance to go for a test drive before the roads are snow-covered for the next four to five months. This ambitious goal is something that all *raggare* share – to be able to drive their cars with pride during the spring and summer months, when they cruise around inner-city streets. The van is his newest project. Previously, he has tended to go for American vintage cars, but now he is up for a new challenge and as soon as he is done, he is looking forward to driving the van with his friends, playing hard rock music, and drinking beer. Compared to his other cars, he explained that the van is bigger and more aggressive looking.

A few weeks later, on a dark November afternoon, I stood in one of his two garages in his house, outside in the freezing cold without my winter jacket. He showed me his Ford Torino – 71, which he distinguishes from his other cars by saying “the yellow one”. Inside the green



Figure 3: “The yellow one”, a Ford Torino – 1971.

painted garage, he had vintage decorations that resemble how an old gas station would look like. Compared to many other garages I have visited; this one is stylish and close to a museum with its second-hand objects that suit the era of the yellow car. He pointed out the parts of the car that needed to be fixed; for example, changing the fabric on the seats and the floor gear lever to better achieve the look he praises. Despite the constant repairing and working, he explained it as a “fun car to drive”.

The Torino has a connection to his adolescence: when he moved from Ullånger to the nearby city Kramfors to start high school, he saw someone with a Torino and the first sight of the car lived on with him. Now he hopes his memory of the car will pass on to others. He tells me the anecdote of him driving it the previous summer when he passed by two boys, approximately seven or eight years old, who were driving soapbox cars. When they saw his car, both gave him thumbs up whereupon Magnus gave them a thumbs up back. After passing them, he pushed a little extra on the accelerator and he could see the boys shout of enjoyment in his rear-view mirror. For Magnus, this moment has a significance of enthusiasm to know that he, like himself once was, has left marks on these boys about a car for life.

This notion of eagerness to pass on the car culture to a new generation has a lot to do with the changed view of *raggare* and the wish to keep the subculture vibrant for many years to come. As earlier described, the reputation of *raggare* has been negative due to how the media portrayed them in the past and that legacy has been carried on for decades. However, the *raggare* I have spoken to believe that the perception of the culture is changing and that they are entering the ‘fine culture’ as they experience more appreciation and a shift in cultural status for the cars and the subculture. Art is very much connected to political struggles and perceptions on what is considered as ‘fine art’. Art and aesthetics have the ability to transform in its meaning in society and for the viewer, thus it is rather relativist when analyzing art in its material matter (Svašek 2007: 154 - 190). The previous negative perceptions of *raggare* and the shift of appreciation is what *raggare* are experiencing at the moment as they are entering the ‘fine art’. They gave the example of being invited to inaugurations, weddings, proms, and horse races to make the shows a bit more special by showing the cars to the audience. For them, the *raggar* culture has transformed into a fine culture and especially the *raggarbilar* are now perceived as fine art, where *raggare* are the caregivers of cultural treasures “because that is what we are really doing.” According to them, the cars are equal to art pieces that fit into national museums. In this way, the agency of the cars is there to bewitch their audience by the aesthetics and the sensuous elements of the cars, just like Magnus once was and for the young boys, in order for



Figure 4: Ford Vedette – 1956.

the *ragggar* culture to continue and develop as well as carrying on legacy and lives of the *ragggarbilar*.

After talking to Magnus for almost two hours in his vintage designed living room, we headed down to his second garage in the house. There he has a Ford Vedette – 56 which he simply calls “femtitalaren” or “the 1950s”. It is an unusual car for its French origin and draws a lot of attention at car events for its rarity hence making it extra fun to show to other car enthusiasts. The Vedette is the car with the most personality among the three: it has a modern V8 engine, making it very nice to drive. For Magnus, the sound of the engine is very important as it gives another level of driving experience when the car “shows some muscles”. He explains that normally a 1950s car can be quite difficult to manage because of loose steering wheels, but not his. Instead, it is more of a *glidarbil*, a car that you drive slowly as it feels like it is gliding on the road, and it makes some unexpected moves when pressing the accelerator pedal. “A little bit like a wolf in sheep’s clothing”, he says – a disguised danger despite its kind looking surface.

The three cars that Magnus has all have different personalities and agency. The van is big, loud, and aggressive yet aiming to be a social hotspot for future rides. The Turino is a childhood dream that came true to Magnus that enchanted him by *the sensory enchantment of materiality* – through its aesthetics, sounds, and the mesmerizing effects of agency to become part of the

car culture that he still is part of today. Lastly, the Ford Vedette is a unique and challenging car that draws attention to its crowd. The way in these objects exert their own influence, somewhat free of Magnus' individual wishes, are examples of how the objects can control and make the person (Latour 1992; 1994, Gell 1992).

According to Niklas⁸, another interlocutor whom I talked to on Skype, a *raggarbil* is given a character or charisma by its owner depending on how it is made and by how the owner chooses to fix the repairs that are needed. As we will see in the next tale, cars are in this way producing a reflection of the driver, but this statement also stresses how much impact the driver has on the car. Niklas added that: "every car has a character, even newer cars – although one might not like the characteristics", implying that newer cars are less personality driven than *raggarbilar*. He continued saying that newer cars do not have a soul compared to older cars because vintage cars are believed to be something more than a car: the cars have a soul because the people who own them give them a soul. To quote Niklas:

"You put your soul into your car. Newer cars do not have a soul in my opinion. If you buy a new car, then there is no soul in the car. It is just a car. Old cars, whether it is American, European, or Japanese... Older cars have a soul. They were made in a different way. They were not standing in a factory and made by a machine, but they were made by humans. So, it is very different depending on the cars."

Through an anthropological view, souls in connection to inanimate objects are a way to see the lives of objects by recognizing their soul and agency. Thus, by observing the souls, it is a way to prevent objects from death (Gilmore 2004 [1919]). In this way, vintage cars, unlike other cars, are objects that are seen to possess a soul, and the agency of the cars can be interpreted as their willingness to stay alive as they are seen as something different. As Niklas stresses, the craftsmanship of the *raggarbilar* is not machine-made but rather a mystified process that brings a sense of fascination and charm, and this can be compared to Gell's (1998) argument of the intention of the artists to persuade the audience. But in this tale, we also see how *raggare* emphasize their own impact on the cars, as they, too, are trying to control the cars. This view lies in the actor-network theory stressed by Latour (1992; 1994) where the two agents are impacted by each other by a series of actions. In this regard, the driver is trying to maintain control of the car, yet the car is also making their own marks on the drivers.

⁸ 'Niklas' is a pseudonym.

The agency of the cars creates both stressful and joyful moments for Magnus – whether it is for him to finish a renovation project of the cars within a certain time limit, a fun moment of driving when he can show off the power of the car or to be a center of attention at car meetings. Knowing the impact of the car – its character, its soul, and how it addresses to others – provide a sensation of amusement for drivers unlike other cars can do. By being in possession of a soul, the cars and the *raggar* subculture will continue to exist. The drivers themselves, too, have an impact on the car, hence there is a two-way relation, but the question is how much control the owner of the car has. I will explore this notion a bit closer in the next two tales.

5.2 Embodiment of Car-*Raggare* – The Tale of Ulrika and the Galaxy

Ulrika, an outgoing and active woman whom I got contact with through a Facebook group, talked to me on Skype. She is working as a social worker and in her spare time she is the chairman of a *raggar* club in central Sweden. She has a Galaxy – 64 and a Fairlane – 57 although her relationship with the Galaxy is much closer. The Galaxy speaks to her, and Ulrika talks back; for example, wishing good night to the car before going to bed. It is a car with a big personality: a bit spoiled yet a faithful companion. For example, the Galaxy does not enjoy humid climate thus it is trickier to start her where Ulrika laughingly joked that “she can be a little bitch sometimes.” Compared to Magnus who did neither name nor address his cars to a gender, Ulrika’s Galaxy has a female pronoun which is because the car is seen as a family member and, more importantly, an extended part of herself:

“She is white, and I have white hair. I did not have that [white hair] when I bought her but today, I do. I have a white dog named Beauty who enjoys sitting in the back seat. So, I have a white car, a white dog and I have white hair myself. Inside, she [the car] is turquoise, and I have green eyes. She is pretty calm and safe but when you step on the pedals, things start to happen and so do I as well.”

Archaeologically, materials have long been a source for human representation. Different use of materials can show various representations of human nature and culture. For example, clay or stones figures have contrasting features yet, in the end, still show an anthropomorphized nature of the artefacts that tells something about how humans are perceived through materialization (Nanoglou 2008). But anthropomorphism can, too, be a translation and embodiment process of self. As Ulrika told me:

“I have many friends with the same interests, and they change cars every now and then. They ask me ‘is it not time to buy a new car?’ and I tell them ‘no, why would I do that?’ This is me. It is part of my personalization. It is me and my Galaxy. It is me, the dog, and the car against the world, you know. It is us together as one.”

This can be interpreted as magical thinking where the owner or the maker sees him or herself in the object. According to the law of similarity, the effects of the object in question bring resemblance through judgement (Rozin and Nemeroff 2002: 203). For example, if something has a positive characteristic it will also bring likeliness while something with a negative clang in a similar way brings negative associations. In a simpler word, this is how people psychologically tend to generalize things. Paul Rozin and Carol Nemeroff illustrate this notion with voodoo practices where the enemy is represented through an object that resembles the person and harm is believed to be handed over to the enemy. The magical thinking can be translated to cars, where the associations of cars cause positive or negative effects on the owner and thus features are conveyed to the driver. What the Galaxy connotes for Ulrika is transferred to how she projects herself in the car. She tells me the story of when someone accidentally backed into her Galaxy and how it was like being injured herself. “Tears welled up! I was both angry, disappointed, sad, and frustrated. All the feelings at the same time. (...) It was like being abused personally.” As for Ulrika, the Galaxy reflects herself – both in terms of look, behavior, and emotions. When the car got hit, so was she.

In a similar vein, embodiment can be understood as a performance. Returning to Niklas, his Buick Wildcat Cabriolet is a companion that gives him comfort in both difficult and happier times – Niklas’ emotional state is reflected when he is driving and becomes an embodied performance. When angry, he drives faster; driving around with friends makes him happy although he also goes for long detours by himself time to time. When driving alone, it is all about pleasure and to reach the feeling of total relaxation. The car brings enjoyment and the feeling of freedom while driving because, according to Niklas, it is not a car one can drive when one is feeling stressed. Rather, it is a vehicle that embodies the driver’s body and the materiality of the car – impacting on each other and the embodiment is enhanced by the sensuous elements that the experience of driving provoke. That is what I emphasize with *the sensory enchantment of materiality*: the sensuous response felt through the connection to an object that evokes emotions, phenomenology and creates a relationship with the person. I will discuss the experience of driving and the senses further in the next chapter where I go through the journey in *raggarbilar*.

However, the embodiment of the experience of driving is nothing new. Back in the days when there were no cell phones, no social media, less TV programs to watch, and certainly in smaller cities less cultural activities happening, the cars became the source and space for social hangouts. In the small towns in Västernorrland, a spontaneous car cruise happened almost every evening in the 1970s or 1980s because “it was either having a hotdog or driving the car.” Per-Erik, who will be introduced in the next tale, described the cars as a *living room* for the youth at the time where they could socialize with each other through the cars. Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson defines homes as it is somewhere “where one best knows oneself – where ‘best’ means ‘most’, even if not always ‘happiest’” (Rapport & Dawson 1998: 10) thus the cars were and are still today a space for comfort and freedom where *raggare* feel like they are being *at home*. Much like for my father and his friends, the cars became the mobile space where *raggare* could escape their parents and a site for maturity of how one should behave, thus a space for bonding and create new acquaintances. Despite being young in a time when it was harder to communicate between each other, the *raggabil* were a sign of identity. In this way, the cars themselves created an identity marker for *raggare* to follow and find new friendships (Eyerman & Löfgren 1995).

Thus, the cars have in this way created a performance of driving one’s home, a performance of creating friendships as well as a performance of therapeutic reasons. As Niklas described it:

“If you feel like crap and you are at your lowest point, you can sit down in the car and just go for a ride. (...) When you sit in the car, you are not alone. It does not feel like that. It has a little soul. It is like it is your little friend you are with. (...) There is a presence of the car too.”

Here again, the souls of the cars bring companionship – both between the car and the driver, but as we notice here, also between *raggare*. To that, in times of hardship and loneliness, anthropomorphizing an object has been a psychological tool to comprehend emotions of social pain (Epley, Waytz and Cacioppo 2007) and the motion of objects contributes to the feeling of the object as alive and as a conscious being (Tremoulet and Feldman 2000).

A third embodiment process is through the concept of skin. Susanne Küchler (1992) has applied ‘the making of skin’ to painted *malanggan* sculptures, wooden carvings from New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, used for mortuary ceremonies to honor the deceased. The paint resembles the body and life of deceased clan members as well as a representation of future life and relationships. Relating this notion to cars, for Ulrika, the relation between her and the Galaxy translates to an embodied process where the surface of the car becomes her skin while



Figure 5: Dodge Dart – 1969.

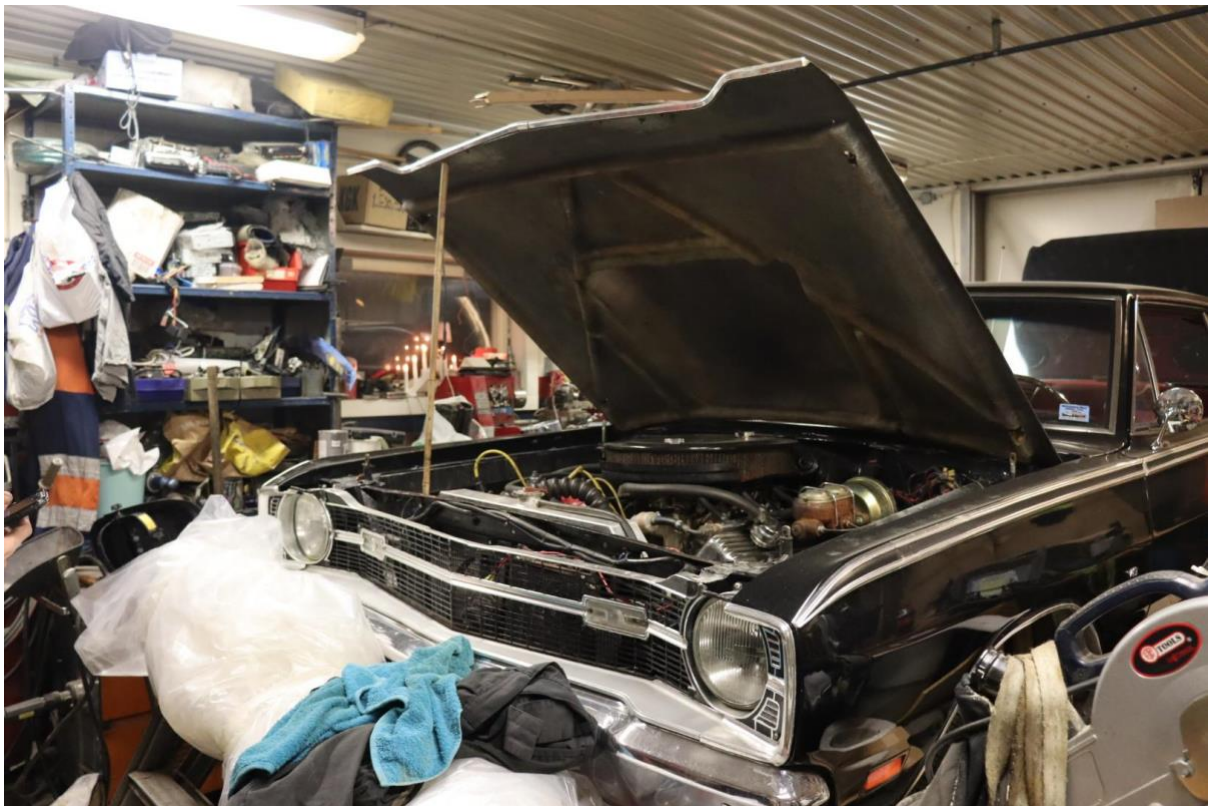


Figure 6: The engine of the Dodge Dart.

driving. The embodied notion transfixes on other *raggare* as they become mesmerized by the intimate relationship between Ulrika and the Galaxy. This perspective that Kuchler takes, further relates to the enchantment of the cars – especially *the sensory enchantment of materiality* that, as we will see, manifests beyond the individual person and materializes into the *raggar* subculture. In this way, the concept of ‘skin’ is a genealogy of material agency that passes on for generations which I now will show how it can apply within *raggare*.

In my meeting with the father-daughter duo Jörgen and Viktoria, they articulated their shared passion for cars and especially Jörgen’s Dodge Dart – 69. The car has been present throughout Viktoria’s whole life and they both see the car as a family member. “I have lived in the car every summer” Viktoria said, while remembering how the family used to travel together in the car to different drag racing events that Jörgen used to compete in. She wants to buy the Dodge if her father ever considers selling it because the car is too tied to childhood memories from the summers.

Jörgen is a well-known personality in the car community in the town, and when Jörgen drives the Dodge, everyone who recognises the car knows it is him behind the steering wheel. This recognition of the car has later passed on to Viktoria when she started to drive it and she became known as “Jörgen’s daughter”. This identity process through the car is not only an amusing detail to the subculture as they tell the struggles of *raggare* creating their own identities. Some people buy new cars because they are being too associated with the old owner. They want to have their *own* identity with the car for others to know that it is *their* car and not the previous owner. However, in the case of Jörgen and Viktoria, the life of the Dodge is passed on through the car’s agency in order to keep its ancestral life to live on with Viktoria (Kuchler 2002). On a bigger perspective, this is how the cars keep the subculture vibrant: while the cars are ageing and for some seen as less neat than newer cars, *raggare* are feeling the duty of carrying the legacy of the *raggarbilar*. As have seen with Viktoria, and, as we earlier saw with Magnus moment with the young boys in soapbox cars, the enchantment of the aesthetics, sitting in the cars and its sensuous elements that come through driving, talking, watching, and feeling the cars are in this way containers of visual memory and thus preventing the culture from dying out when it passes on to a new generation (*ibid.*, 2002).

Along these lines, the car-*raggare* embodiment occurs in various ways: as reflections and identity of oneself, as a performance on the road, a home where one is the most comfortable, and as a second surface that keeps the culture from dying out. The Galaxy thus is more than an object to Ulrika and even superior to her own being. It is perhaps fair to say that the life of the *raggarbilar* represents more to life and ourselves than we can imagine because of their agency,

human-like elements, and their ability to pass on genealogical traits much like the ‘skin’ of the *malangan* sculptures embody and carry on the life of deceased members of the Melanesian clan (Küchler 1992) for the survival of the *raggar* subculture.

5.3 Gendered Cars and Car Partnership – The Tale of Per-Erik and Nadine

My father and I drove along the highway to Ullånger to meet up with his friend Per-Erik. He is active in the motor club Coast League Cruisers (CLC) where I met him for the interview. He and his friend Raymond, who is also there for the meeting, spend many hours at the motor club to work on their cars and they have renovated the club with 1950s decorations. In the kitchen where we sat down for a cup of coffee, the tables have black and white squared tablecloths, and they are embellished with 1950s American icons such as Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe. Walking around the in garage, at the very front of the garage, his darling, a Pontiac – 1956, is standing proudly and he presents it to me:

- This one is called Nadine. She is important to me. She is special. Nadine, you know, is a song by Chuck Berry about a slightly stubborn woman who keeps running away from him. Like ‘why cannot you be faithful?’ This is how it is with women, or at least for me, that I have some demands on how they should be,” he says laughingly.
- Is the stubbornness and unfaithfulness her personality? I ask.
- It is a personality. You can see from the shapes that she is a woman.

For him, cars have gender connotations, just like people. Per-Erik, who used to be shy as a young boy, owning a *ragnarbil* became a tool for him to approach girls just like many others used the cars in the early days of *raggare*. Later, he met his wife at a car festival, and they were married for 20 years before her death a few years ago. Today, Nadine is his ‘woman number two’. While studies on cars from a gender perspective tend to focus on gender differences,⁹ material culture offers ways to approach objects as gendered and engendered, and how social relationships are created through such objects. A good example for this is Anna-Karina Hermkens’ (2013) study that describes how barkcloths made by Maisin women in Papua New Guinea shape the identity of people through gendered garments.

⁹ For example, Pauline Garvey (2001) has examined gender differences in risk taking in relation between gender, drinking and the state, Joshua Hotaka Roth (2014) studies how binary discourses are being used between male and female drivers in contemporary Japan and Negin Sattari (2020) discusses labor-related issues in her article on female taxi drivers and discourses in Iran.



Figure 7: Pontiac – 1956, also known as Nadine.

Albeit studies on sex and gender have for the last few decades towed a social constructivist line (see: Butler 1990; 2011 [1993]), with gender in constant change, the vision of ‘traditional’ gender roles, especially in the case of fashion and other cultural expressions, are to some degree still ideals of cars within the *raggar* subculture. For example, it is not uncommon for people to dress up in 1950s and 1960s rockabilly style clothing. Men are wearing James Dean and Marlon Brando inspired leather jackets or vests, Levi jeans and greased hair. The women have colorful dresses, big hair and other vintage details that bring one back to another era. Traditional gender roles can thus be seen to lay within the subculture’s practices and aesthetic expressions are not necessarily automatically translated to stereotypes of how the men and women ought to be or act like. It was often pointed out to me by my interlocutors that the *raggar* subculture does not question who you are, and it allows everyone to be simply themselves. Although the way Per-Erik speaks about how Nadine gossips is rooted in an older idea of how women behave, it is not necessarily representative of how other men speak or think of women and femininity.

However, stereotypical female and male characteristics are commonly being used when describing cars and it is more common for cars to have female names than male. It was suggested to me that cars are objects one takes care of dearly and perhaps on a level that is equal to one’s partner. For Per-Erik, Nadine with her pastel colours and curved angles are female coded. The grille and eyes are friendly-looking which contributes to the anthropomorphisation as female. Comparably, Niklas, described his black Buick Wildcat as evil-looking with a ‘cocky’ or ‘aggressive’ attitude and even though he did not have a pronoun for the car, he realized during the interview that he was calling the car ‘he’. The faces of cars are thus examples of how objects trigger emotions depending on how they look and are also used as a marketing strategy of the products and brands (Landwehr, McGill and Herrmann 2011). These elements of human-like attributes and acts also impact on the gendered objects, where friendly cars are seen as female and aggressive as male.¹⁰ The materiality of colours, too, have agency and can be a source of constituting social relations that affects people in different ways (Young 2006). Among my interlocutors, darker colours signal male agency and lighter coloured cars tend to be perceived as female. In this way, the cars can be understood to express a certain gender through their colours and characteristic attributes – an example of their agency, but also, in this case, depending on the owner’s personal understanding of gender.

¹⁰ In this video, I show an example of how sound and color can be interpreted as gendered. Its ‘stubbornness’ in combination of its black color creates an impression of the car as male coded:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icr0T1awrY4&list=PLOc6kASvP_5j3XqerBocRHKuyAlXARIIv&index=2

Furthermore, Per-Erik looks at Nadine with pure faithfulness. She is a partner to be trusted no matter how much time she necessitates. He tells me when he had to change garage spot and felt a great commitment to her:

- “I get pretty comfortable when I meet the lady here. In fact, she has meant the most to me lately, actually. In the end, it has come down to the fact that she controls my life right now and has done it for a while. I had to take care of her quite a lot this autumn. I had to renovate her in one and a half or two weeks so she could be transported. I had to put a lot of time on her because I was kicked out of a garage. Or, I chose to move because the rent was getting too high and then she was going to move in here [to the garage in CLC]. It was a bit hectic.”
- “Do you feel loyalty to your car?” I ask.
- “Yes, definitely. She had to drive in here with dignity and if she was in pieces, it would have been... She was not supposed to drive in here as an object. (...) I have inserted glass planes and fixed the interior. I have added lister chrome and rubber mouldings. Yes, a lot of things has been done in just a few weeks. So, she rolled in here with dignity and put herself in the front.”

Despite the human-like characteristics of Nadine and his emphasis on her not being a simple object, Per-Erik keeps her in mind first and foremost as a material investment that requires a lot of attention, telling him to add more fuel or what needs to be fixed, thus controlling Per-Erik more than he controls her. Here, we once again see how the agency of the car directs the driver, but we can look at this from an alternative viewpoint, namely post-humanism, where the car-driver hybrid has been replaced by a master-slave dialectic. Donna Haraway (1991) developed an approach on how the human body is understood as an aid to cyborg technologies rather than the human body being in control of living organisms and machines. The theory of cyborgs, as she calls it, explain the co-evolution between human-machines as well as animals – an embodiment based on organic fusion of symbiotic life and technological systems. So, if cars are seen as an organism, they will have more control of human beings than we imagine, according to Haraway. We can see this from the Per-Erik-Nadine relation where she in many ways has more authority over him. Similarly, Niklas experience guilt when he is not working on his Buick Wildcat, and obeys when the car tells him to do unexpected things such as pressing the accelerator to go faster or tells him to slow down. Thus, the agency of the car is stronger than we sometimes imagine through its two-way mediation and social agency (Gell 1998, Latour 1992; 1994) and this could be turned into an, at times, unequal and unruly power balance between the car and the owner.

As we have seen in this tale, a car can, through its attributes, express a certain agency: becoming female or male, or even a partner. Through Per-Erik's perception to femininity – Nadine's features, color, and unconditional love – he is experiencing a love relationship that is close to a partner. More specifically, Per-Erik feels the agency of Nadine through her aesthetic features, from her ability to speak to him and, as we will go deeper into later in the next chapter, from bringing him comfort while driving. For Per-Erik, Nadine is a female partner that resembles an imaginative era from the past – one that is entangled with perception and memory. Even though Nadine is pure in its materiality, Per-Erik feels loyalty to her which can be explained through post-humanist theory where Nadine is controlling him more than he wants to believe.

5.4 Anthropomorphized Cars

The notion of anthropomorphic characters is nothing new and regarding cars, it has been depicted in for example beloved movies such as Walt Disney's *The Love Bug*¹¹ (Stevenson 1968) starring Herbie and in Pixar's animated film *Cars* (Lasseter and Ranft 2006) with Lightning McQueen, where the cars are sentient beings. Magnus, Ulrika, and Per-Erik the other mentioned interlocutors, they all anthropomorphize their cars to a degree where the cars are companions that guide them through life that no other cars can achieve, thus the cars are seen as more than simple objects. By anthropomorphizing the cars, they become objects that provide comfort, partnership and kinship, and a sense of being at ease in both happy and stressful times, and it is evident that my interlocutors do not always understand the impact the cars have on them. In the long term, this affects the *raggar* subculture when processes of embodiment, similar to Küchler's (1992) argument around skins, become a tool to prevent the deaths of the cars. Hence, the collective experience of the cars, through their materiality, contributes to culture and social bonding between people.

What these tales have in common are the phenomenological traces of the cars from my interlocutor's youths and adulthood, and this aspect is equally important to the sentient of the cars as they are perceived into memories and imaginations for the drivers. In the next chapter, I will focus on this matter and take a further step to incorporate *the sensory enchantment of materiality* to the cars and *raggare* to show how the senses play an important part of how the cars are being approached and remembered.

¹¹ The Swedish title of the movie is *Gasen i botten, Herbie!*

PART III – THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE CAR

6. Embracing the Car

One day after several setbacks of cancelled interviews and less people showing up to the garage in central Örnköldsvik, I decided to go to SHRA. Before driving there, I messaged Magnus and asked him if he knew if anyone would be there this evening. He thought there might be a few because he had recently been there and saw some people working on their cars. After driving for 20 minutes in heavy snowfall, I arrived. The inside was lit, and the door was unlocked. Finally, I would get to do some more ethnography! The pandemic had really made it difficult to be an anthropologist in the field.

I stepped inside and it was completely quiet. Tools were left everywhere next to the cars, ready to be picked up again for the up-coming mechanics session. Someone had thrown their sweatshirt on the hood of one of the cars and a box of Swedish tobacco had been left forgotten on a table. I walked around the cars to see if there was someone there. I even looked under and behind the cars, yet no one seemed to be there. I walked towards the door that led to the cafeteria, but the door latch was locked. I opened it and was faced by a pitch-black corridor. This was when I realised there is no hope left to get some ethnographic material today. I turned on the light in the cafeteria and messaged Magnus again and explained what had happened. He guessed that the last person who was there forgot to lock the door and promised to take care of it.

Meanwhile, I had a short stroll around the cafeteria and took some photos with my camera. Although I had not been to this motor club for many years until this research project, I see it as one of the places I grew up with. The smell and the atmosphere of the site gave me flashbacks: I remembered as a child how me and my brother used to play darts and pool even though we were too short to reach the table. I remembered a pinball machine, but they must have removed it a long time ago. Along the walls, there were couches and, on the walls, there were photos from previous events and members of the club. On one of them, I spotted my father, my uncle, and a mutual friend of theirs from the time my father used to compete in drag racing and my uncle assisted him with the mechanical part. The photo was from 1995, one year after I was born, shortly before he stopped competing.

Being full of flashback moments, I headed back to the garage, and locked the door latch again. Strolling next to the cars, I realised that I do not feel completely alone next to these cars. Perhaps I have read too many anthropological articles about cars, embodiment of materials and



Figure 8: Inside an empty SHRA



Figure 9: Work in progress.

anthropomorphism that I started to view the cars in a different way. In this moment of loneliness and frustration, I perceived the cars as companions. I was not feeling completely alone anymore.

When I finally got back to my mother's car, I put on some music and waited for an answer from Magnus to make sure that someone was coming to lock the entrance door. While waiting, I thought about how there is something special about sitting alone in a car. It has a calming effect and especially in strange situations like what I have just experienced. This day in an industrial area, another time in a parking lot next to a beach, or somewhere else. When Magnus messaged me that someone was coming to lock the door and turn off the lights, I started to drive aimlessly. The only thing I knew was that I did not want to go home yet. I needed to clear my head from this struggling fieldwork. I hated the circumstances Covid-19 had created in the last few months: not seeing my friends nor classmates, not being able to hug, not being able to walk around freely without fearing infecting myself or others. When I drove, I concentrated on the road and nothing else and suddenly I had been driving for an hour. At that moment, I understood what my informants mean when they describe the relaxation of driving cars.

Without even reflecting much about it before, I realized that I *do* have a personal relationship to cars as well as many memories of the culture that I had forgotten. Because I was utilizing my body and my senses, during this day of fieldwork, I could approach the cars in a way that I had never done before. They were not foreign nor frightening any longer as I had allowed myself to embrace them. To that, even though I did not drive a *raggabil* at this moment, the car gave me comfort during stressful times.

This chapter will focus on how the cars bring meaning making into practice, meaning that it will touch upon what the cars do to people, which will be considered through a phenomenological perspective. Three topics will be addressed: the journey, the aesthetics of cars and garages because these are essential concerns that impact and have impacted on *raggare*. The journey relates to the sensuous aspect of driving and how it becomes an escape from the world around them through different mechanisms as well from memories from the past. I then scrutinise the effect of aesthetics to see what attracts a *raggare* to certain cars. I end the chapter by addressing the significance of garages as they are sites for social bonding – both with cars but more importantly, between *raggare* themselves.

6.1 The Journey

- “I am very nerdy and can tell you that when I sit down in the car and drive somewhere, I feel like I have a screen in front of me. It is like you are back in the 1950s or 1960s Sweden,” Per-Erik says, followed by a big laugh.
- “You do not feel the same with a passenger car?”
- “No, then it is only for transporting myself from point A to point B. In a *raggabil*, the journey is the goal.”

The *raggabil* is expressed as different to a ‘normal car’. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the cars have anthropomorphic characters, expressed through various personalities, gender and even souls that create the experience of embodiment and companionship. However, these attributes would not be possible without the action of driving. As the *raggar* subculture is based on mobility through cruising and spontaneous hangouts, the journey is crucial for the social relation between *raggare*. Nonetheless, the driving experience is expressed differently when driving alone. The journey is described as something unexplainable – it is a performance that impacts the driver to leave out his or her own identity, as the technology of the vehicle, the speed, and the road all together transform the driver (Baudrillard 2008 [1995]).

6.1.1 Liminality and the Enhanced Sensuous Elements

The experience of driving can be compared to the concept of liminality that was brought to the field of anthropology to illustrate the state of being in-between in transitional religious rituals (Turner 1995 [1969], Turner and Turner 1978). The rite of passage, or the threshold, where one has not yet entered the ‘new space’, can be comparable to journeys, such as pilgrimage (Badone and Roseman 2014) and hitchhiking (Laviolette 2016) because of its time space before arriving. That state involves multiple emotions, senses, thoughts, and beliefs that impact on the human being. Likewise, liminality within the hitchhiker community is expressed as:

“[t]he experience of shifting from the roadside to the car’s inside reveals a unique angle on how the hitchhikers see and feel the world. Suddenly, they are less focused on the horizon, the world out there. Instead, sight and sound, small and tact, are thrust into the confined space of someone else’s vehicle, in close quarters with another presence.” (Laviolette 2016: 394)

In the case of *raggare*, the liminality is expressing what the car does and affords to them while driving, and how it becomes an in-between space between the outside world and inside the car. Marc Augé would describe atemporal places, those without natural social interactions, as a ‘non-place’. Such places could be when you are waiting at an airport or doing grocery shopping, where “the space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude” (Augé 1995: 103). On the contrary, *raggare* understand the car as a ‘mobile happy home’ (Rapport & Dawson 1998) when driving together, but the car can also be a site for in-betweenness and embodiment, “the car and I as one”, when driving solo.

There are different ways of how this sensuous state is created during a car journey inside a *raggarbil*. As earlier mentioned, going for a ride can be seen as therapeutic when one is in-between the ‘real’ and ‘inside of the car’ worlds. This state can be emotionally enhanced if the weather is good: a perfect ride would include a warm and sunny summer day when one can have the roof *nedcabbad*, meaning that the roof is lowered, hearing the engine outside, feeling the movement of the car and the wind in the hair. Another feature is music, as it was commonly expressed that not all types of music suit the journey inside a *raggarbil*: if one would play dubstep or commercial radio, as it was suggested to me, it would not generate the right state of emotion for the driver. The music most frequently suggested to me was rockabilly or hard rock because the cars *themselves* were mainly selecting that type of audio for the excursion according to my interlocutors.¹² Thus, the *social agency* (Gell 1998) of the car tells the driver what music ought to be played. There is a difference between *raggarbilar* and newer passenger cars because the driving experience and unfamiliar audios would not match each other, thus the car-*raggare* are creating their own soundscape (Bull 2001).

A further sound-related feature, which is even more important than music, is the sound of the vehicle:

“It ought to feel old, you know. Everything is not perfect. It is older stuff you are driving. It should rattle some. Or rattle... It should drive well you know! The feeling of sitting inside should be like ‘this is old times.’ The meter, the interior and all of that. The short period of time you drive, I believe it is worth to pay for some extra gas and take some time to fix the car.”

¹² In this video, we can get a better grasp of what kind of music enhances the driving experience for many *raggare*:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37Sg5PpDaOk&list=PLOc6kASvP_5j3XqerBocRHKuyAIXARIIv&index=4

Audio representation is the key for understanding subcultures (Hebdige 1988 [1979]: 90) and that is why the rumbling sound of a V8 engine, the central feature of the *raggarbil*, is crucial for the driving experience.¹³ It is what brings the feeling of freedom because of its source of adrenaline and power on the road. “There is something special about V8 – both the sound and the feeling. The whole car is vibrating a little bit.” Knowing the darting impact of the sound of the engine encourages aimless rides which other cars cannot convey.

The sound, too, boosts attention from other drivers and pedestrians. While driving, the drivers honk at other *raggare* or get thumbs up from people on the streets. However, it was important for my interlocutors to point out that the attention was never an intention from the owner of the car: “I am not here to seek attention. It is just me enjoying my car.” The cars are what deserves the attention, and it is them who constitute bonding between *raggare* at car festivals, on the streets and car meetings.

6.1.2 Memories and Nostalgia from Car Cruises

The American vintage cars are associated with the memories of an era from the past – a time when the economy was booming, the Swedish society looked differently but more importantly, the older generation of *raggare* were young. Through car events where childhood friends and other acquaintances meet, the memories of adolescence and the imagination of the early *raggar* years in 1950s Sweden are recalled. In the lowrider community, it is expressed: “[a]re things beautiful just because they are? Do they feel good just because they do? I say no. I say memory makes them that way” (Taylor 2009: 35). This is similar for *raggare*: the cars would not be approached the same without the memoir of the phenomenology of the *raggarbil* and *raggar* culture. That cultural memory has in recent years become more apparent through *raggar* groups on Facebook where people share photos from the past and present, and therefore creating a new collective memory (Connerton 2006: 317)

The *raggarbilar* were and still are potent signs of identity (Eyerman & Löfgren 1995). Leffe, who used to be active in the *raggar* circuits in Stockholm in the 1970s, asked himself: “how the fuck did we find each other? We did not have cell phones back then!” When he is trying to remember how he and his friends managed to meet up, he explains that one saw another *raggarbil* and started to follow it. The car and the driver are normally interconnected which can

¹³ An example of the rumbling sound of the V8 engine can be heard through this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEo71wZHvhQ&list=PLOc6kASvP_5j3XqerBocRHKuyAlXARIIv&index=1

be expressed when referring to someone. Not uncommonly, my interlocutors said for example “you know the guy who has a blue Plymouth Belvedere – 66” when alluding to a specific person.

Memories from car crusings in their adolescence are thus part of what still brings the subculture together. It is a shared passion for the sound, sight, smell and feeling of the car. The present-day car events are more organised than it used to be according to my interlocutors, but organised car meetings have made the culture more inclusive for those who do not own their own *raggarbil* as they are open for everyone to watch the cars and interact with the people, and this is most notable among elders and families. They, too, have a connection to the cars as they were seeing them in adulthood and for new parents, they want to present their children with unique cars. At times, my interlocutors have been asked by strangers if they can join for a car drive: “you can tell that the elders shine up when they are joining for a ride. They are looking, touching and are like ‘oh, imagine if I had a car like this!’ You can tell that the cars invoke memories.” Hence, the car meetings and cruises conceive curiosity, memories, and sensuous participation for those outside of the subculture as well.

6.1.3 Fears and Changed Perceptions to the Experience of Driving

The emotional state of driving is combined with many different aspects. The senses were primarily the sight, hearing, touching, and smelling play a great part of the experience of the car while driving. However, there is a fear that there is a potential ‘death of *raggare*’ that could impact this notion.

Firstly, the prices of the cars have skyrocketed in the last few decades, hence it is not as affordable for new car enthusiasts to join the subculture as it once was. Therefore, established *raggare* from the older generation seek to make the *raggar* culture worth pursuing to keep the culture vibrant. Secondly, there is a feeling that they are exposed to ‘a tactic of intimidation’ by environmentally conscious people, with some *raggare* I talked to feeling blamed for not being environmentally friendly enough. Raymond mentioned an episode when he was refuelling his car at a gas station and a Tesla driver covered his nose when seeing Raymond’s car. Nonetheless, it was argued that there is a misconception of how polluting the cars are. Per-Erik and Raymond argued that people do not think about the fact that *raggarbilar* are seasonal, as they are mainly driven during summers, and that they do not produce much material waste compared to newly produced cars.

Despite this conflict, *raggare* have expressed willingness to adjust to more environmentally friendly alternatives, such as changing the engine to drive non-fossil alternatives, but this change would also impact on how the cars are sensuously approached, as, for example, the sonic authenticity of the engine and the bumpiness of driving would be different. Thus, the lived experience of the car that *raggare* share a passion for would no longer be the same. Mimi Sheller writes what she calls ‘automotive emotions’ is important for the kinaesthetic perception that depends on different scale of social and cultural environment. In the context of the future of cars, she writes that people are not willing to easily give up on cars because “they are deeply embedded in ways of life, networks of friendship and sociality, and moral commitments to family and care for others” (Sheller 2004: 236). It is not surprising then that there is a fear of what environmental adjustments could impact on the experience of driving for *raggare*.

6.1.4 Summary: Phenomenology and the Senses While Driving

In this section, I have shown various ways of how phenomenology and the senses are tied to the experience of the journey. Here, Gell’s (1994) *technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology* is highly present when discussing the mesmerizing effects of an object while driving, but even more so when applying *the sensory enchantment of materiality* perspective. The cars are sensuous objects that are enhanced while driving, but also connected to memories from the past as well as imaginations of what the car and the surrounding environment could be like – a nostalgia of the adolescence and a dream of ‘the old Sweden.’ Driving a *raggarbil* provides a state of liminality where the outside world is close to being absent for the driver. Perfect weather, some suitable music and the sound of the engine heighten the state of sensation which other cars cannot accomplish in the same way. However, there is a scare that this will change in the future if more pressure is put on the subculture to become more environmentally friendly.

6.2 The Aesthetics of Cars

The cars' aesthetics are an important component that is linked not only to the look of the cars, but also in creating the 'sensual feeling' of the cars. Whilst the materiality of objects is what creates the social relations, the physicality is a fundamental aspect of the cars' ability to enchant. How we experience and feel objects with our sight is a first indicator of how we will approach the objects in the long run, and the eyes are also part of a whole body-experience – together with the touch, taste, sound, and smell of artefacts – that impacts our vision of things (Merleau-Ponty 1964).

6.2.1 The Right “*Stuk*”

The enchantment is not directed towards all types of cars – everyone has different tastes in cars, and it can change over time. For example, some cars that my interlocutors appreciated in their youths are now looked at with disgrace. Leffe suggested that sometimes one needs some time to absorb the aesthetics of a car in order to fully appreciate it. The hope and dream is to have an awakening experience of a first view of a car – a love at first sight or an enchanted moment. Magnus conveyed it similarly: “For me, it is very important to have the right style, the right type of wheels... For me it is the most important part actually. The *stuk*.”

For Magnus, *stuket*, which can be translated to style, but the word also transfers a sense of feeling of the material, gives a certain sensation of the car when all the aesthetic elements match each other. One can have a very fine car but when the wheels or the rims are not right, the car would not have the same *stuk*. The feeling of the material can be tied to Jeremy Coote's (1992) 'aesthetic effects' which initiate a shift of focus within the anthropology of aesthetics, where aesthetics is independent from art and rather a way of perceiving. He argues that perception is culturally embedded and urges the anthropologist to aim to see what the interlocutors experience (*ibid.*: 247-248). Thus, the *stuk* is a physical quality that brings attraction, attention and feeling when a car feels right for the person. It can be appreciated by others, but not necessarily perfect for all. How one decides to decorate the car, too, shows how the cars become individualized through aesthetic changes and can bring another level of sensation of driving (Miller 2009).¹⁴

¹⁴ In this video, I give a small insight of how vinyl records are used as decorative items that gives a personal aesthetic to the car:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_iaVdXx0MA&list=PLOc6kASvP_5j3XqerBocRHKuyAlXARIIv&index=3



Figure 10: Inside a Ford Custom Victoria – 1956.



Figure 11: Inside a Cadillac – 1956.

The *stuk*, or the style is highly connected to colours. The type of car and its colour tend to match each other. For Ulrika, as we have seen, colours should match each other to create a nice-looking scene for the eye. She gives the example of the interior, and the exterior should complement each other like her white and turquoise Galaxy does. A big muscle car, most commonly driven by *pilsnerraggare*, *raggare* from the younger generation, has preferably a strong, dark colour that gives it a soul and an aggressive or cocky attitude to the car while pastel colours indicate a more playful and cherish character to a car. This too translates into *the sensory enchantment of materiality* where the aesthetics are felt through the senses. Colours in this way exaggerate emotional responses and create phenomenological moments to cherish. William Calvo (2011) has discussed the use of colours within the lowrider subculture which is a predominantly chicana/o-based culture, and how colours for them can show cultural expression and experiences.¹⁵ Thus, colours are an expression for cultural and social identity within the American setting hence it shows a visual representation of a narrative of origin, their struggles and way forward. In a similar vein, the use of *raggarbilar* is a sign of cultural heritage within the Swedish national context, but the colours of the cars are also secretly telling about generational boundaries as pastel colours are more appreciated by the older generation while matte black is more common among the youths.

6.2.2 The Authenticity of the Cars: Notes on Being ‘Original’, Återfallsraggare and Pilsnerraggare

A shared opinion on the aesthetic appearance of *raggarbilar* is the importance of being *original*, meaning that the car ought not to be too modified or customised too much. Niklas expressed that originality, or authenticity, is what brings the character of the car. Although a car might be considered good looking, those who are not close to the original look are seen as less valued for the viewer’s eye. The soul of old vintage cars gets lost otherwise hence the uniqueness of the car is vanished into something else. Raymond proclaimed that:

“They [the cars] are like pieces of art! If you walk to the garage out here and take a look at how the bumper is constructed, the interior, dashboard... For example, in my car, it is pressed ‘1956’. Who would put money on such a thing today? Back then, you did not think about the weight of the cars yet the opposite. Biggest, longest and widest! That was what you were looking for. Today, the cars ought to be as light weighted and consume as little gas as possible.”

¹⁵ Chicana/o (also known as chican@ to diminish the feminine or masculine ending of the nouns) is relating to the culture of Mexican Americans.

Here we see those features of the cars, such as the dashboard or prints, is what distinguishes the car from newer ones. The cars are not perceived through a certain monetary vision, but instead as a work of art that is well respected, and if one makes too many changes it will no longer be the same sensation of the car. For Raymond, the *stuk* of the car is essential to maintain the feeling of the car, and the sensory elements such as how to use the steering wheel or to feel the heaviness of the cars are connected to this experience.

Återfallsraggare,¹⁶ those who used to be *raggare* in their youths but left the car interest as they started their own family and later returned to *raggarbilar* when their children became adults, experience the attraction of *the stuk*. They might buy the same car they once owned because they missed it, or they buy the car they dreamt of in their youth. “If you buy a *jänkare* [a *raggarbil*] again when you are 50 years old, you are not buying it for a certain social interest but because there is a feeling about the car.” Thus, the memories and affections of the cars are prevalent and never ‘washed away’ as it was expressed. The perception and sensuous memories are still engraved within the person and where the *stuk* is providing the return of the cars.

Howbeit, problems could arise when the objects are considered inauthentic for an outside audience, as it challenges the culture’s own perception to what is considered original or authentic for them (Coleman 2001). The drivers themselves should know the value of the cars because these are old and unique cars. Another mutual comment expressed was the necessity to be able to drive the car, meaning that the cars ought to be more than art objects. In recent years, *raggarbilar* have become an object for status along with the increased prices of the cars. To that, the condition of the car can tell us much about the costs put into the cars.

Pierre Bourdieu (2010 [1979]) would argue that cars are seen as status symbols that can enhance or distinct one’s place in society and here, we see how the once working-based subculture has a fraction from what it once was. It was expressed that when *Power Big Meet* in Västerås started to give credits to the best-looking cars, the aesthetic level of the cars increased to unreachable levels. The wealthiest could use their capital benefits to improve their cars and in that way social class has become more present within the subculture. Another articulated turning point was when the TV programme *Overhaulin’* – a reality show about automobile design – premiered and car enthusiasts became more encouraged to design their cars more freely. While some are tied to the essence of how the cars once used to look and the recent development of experiments of the aesthetics, there is yet a presence of common sense where

¹⁶ Directly translated as ‘relapse *raggare*’. The term is, to my understanding, not used nation-wide but rather in a dialectical context.

one ought not to question the look of the cars. The cars are tied to the drivers; thus, critique would be interpreted as a personal attack.

On the contrary, a discussion that kept coming up during the fieldwork was regarding *pilsnerraggare*. A stereotypical *pilsnerraggare* is driving a trashy Volvo 740 – caused by jumps on the hood – playing loud music in large groups (or ‘noise’ as my interlocutors preferred to call it) while drinking alcohol. It was expressed that they did not respect the cars and their aesthetics enough which creates a generational boundary within the subculture: a conflict of how to perceive the cars aesthetically and through their authentic value. While I have not dwelled myself in this conflict, it is important to note, as already mentioned, that the younger generation is regarded as the gateway to a persistent *raggar* culture for the future. Therefore, issues like these are crucial to highlight in order to understand the developments within the subculture and the aesthetic perceptions to cars.

6.2.3 Summary: The Aesthetic Effect of Cars

In this section, I have explored how aesthetics affect *raggare* through a sensory lens. Different cars put different spells on people, and, again, it is tied to how the cars are phenomenologically perceived and essentially a great part of how the cars become meaningful, as it is connected to a first memory of certain cars. This first sensuous encounter of the material can live on for years and make people return to the cars, as in the case of *återfallsraggare*. Although not all cars have the same aesthetic effect on people (Coote 1992), whether they have the right *stuk* or not, it does not mean that all cars are not appreciated – there is something interesting about the aesthetics in every car. Furthermore, cars can become more individualistic through decorations (Miller 2009) and colour choices that show personal preferences and histories (Calvo 2011). However, if the cars are too modified or become something that is more of a ‘show off’, they are in danger of losing their authenticity. Thus, the craftsmanship of the cars are admired and has the ability to bewitch *raggare* (Gell 1992).

6.3 Garages: Sites for Enchantment

“You need a garage. Otherwise, you cannot do it.”

Garages are essential sites for *raggare* and without garages, the car interest would not be possible. Being within the *raggare* subculture requires to a large extent that one has a garage spot, whether it is in your own house or in a shared garage. It is a place where things happen: repairing the cars, drinking coffee or beer, playing music and hanging out alone with the car or together with friends. It is a gathering place where everyone is welcome: you do not need to look or act in a certain way, and you can simply walk in there as you are. Simply put it, it is a site for relaxation. Some would even claim it is a site for therapeutic reasoning. Ulrika said: “It becomes a second home. The only thing missing is a bed!” The motor club she is the chairman of has arranged New Year’s dinners in their garage hence becoming a site for socialising beyond the cars for her. For Viktoria, her father’s garage is the one of the most important places of her up-bringing because “everything was there!” Growing up in the countryside with poor Wi-Fi connection and long distances to her friends, the garage was the place where she spent most of her spare time. It became her safe spot where she could develop her interest in cars. When she steps into her garage, always greet her cars with “hello my little darlings!” In a sense, garages are a social landscape full of sensory and cultural marks (MacDougall 2006: 95) that ought to be addressed in the case of *raggare*.

6.3.1 Sensuous Requirements: The Social Aesthetics of Garages

Some of the sensuous aspects are tied to the requirements of what a garage entails: it should not look too stylish and not too clean, yet it still ought to be organised with tool cabinets. In the garages I visited, kitchen tables have been the centre pieces of the rooms and along the walls there have been shelves for tools and old car magazines for people to skim through. For Per-Erik and Raymond, a nice garage is for the types of cars that are made for exhibitions, hence the aesthetic of the garage is crucial. They distinguish between garages that are made for people who are fixing and using their cars and those for people who are polishing their cars, thus not using the car for the driving experience. On the other hand, garages too can be a very individualized place for aesthetic expression, such as Magnus’ that is filled with vintage items that complements the atmosphere of the cars.

More importantly, it must smell like a garage: the scent of fuel, motor oil and old cars. “If you enter a garage and it does not smell oil and fuel, then it is not a garage. Then it is too nice.” The scents are part of the experience and the feeling of being in a garage, creating a comfortable environment for the people there and reminding them of the cars and up-coming adventures with the cars. Audio is also an important aspect of the experience of garages for most. It does not need to be a certain music, yet, having a background sound of the radio or a playlist on Spotify makes the flow of working on cars better as well as less lonely there if one is there by themselves.¹⁷

Within this frame, a ‘social aesthetics’ is developed and followed within the subculture. David MacDougall (2006) developed this concept from his study in an Indian elite boarding school to demonstrate how sensory experience from cultural expressions are developed and followed within an institution. He writes that:

“[i]t often seems that the aesthetic features of a society are too easily assimilated into other categories, to such an extent that they become invisible or are ignored. Alternatively, aesthetic features may simply be seen as the symbolic expression of more profound forces (such as history and ideology) rather than influential in their own right.” (*ibid.*: 98).

In a similar vein, the sensuous experience in garages is culturally embedded and developed within a framework of what *raggare* believe is necessary for the place to create the right aesthetic and atmosphere.

6.3.2 Tacit Knowledge: The Material Interaction Between Raggare-Cars

Garages are also spaces where tacit knowledge is being produced – both the knowledge of cars as well as how to interact with them. Michael Polanyi describes tacit knowledge as “a way to know more than we can tell” (Polanyi 1966: 18) in which we learn the inexplicable about things through our body and mind. The discussions people have with each other unconsciously amplify the knowledge production of cars. As Magnus expressed, he often feels like he does not get anything done on his car. He arrives at SHRA, has a cup of coffee, sits down on the sofa while chatting with someone else and suddenly the whole evening is gone. Nonetheless, the conversations he and the others have are mainly about cars. The way to socialise is through the

¹⁷ In this video, I show other surrounding sounds that is, besides music, seen as a part of the garage experience: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_iaVdXx0MA&list=PLOc6kASvP_5j3XqerBocRHKuyAIXARIIv&index=3

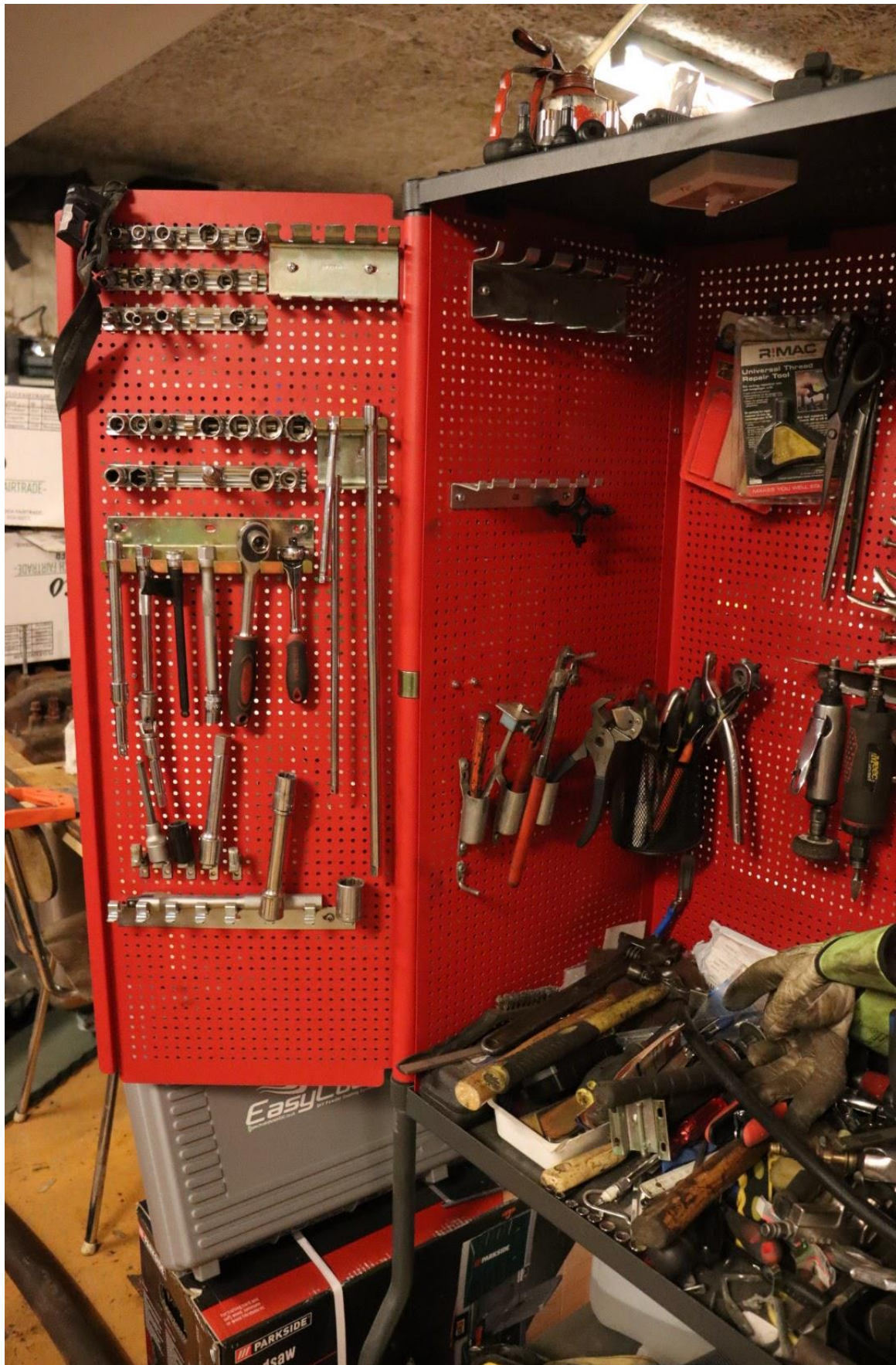


Figure 14. Toolbox.

talks about cars, sharing ideas, knowledge, suggestions, and the latest updates within the world of cars builds up a huge bank of knowledge, making it a site of knowledge production about cars. However, tacit knowledge does not give a full understanding of how the knowledge production of *raggare* occurs. Rather, the shared discussions between them provide knowledge that they did not think about, hence an additional level of learning the inexplicable about cars through a socialisation process.

Even though I had expected more interaction between the cars and the people I met before the fieldwork, it was clear from listening to their conversation that they knew exactly how to manage their cars. Tim Dant (2005) describes the process of high cultural interplay with materials as a ‘material interaction’ and gives the ethnographic example of car repair men working in a garage. He discusses how their close interplay with the cars illustrates skilful and habitual gestures that have been in motion from early childhood while they grew up close to car materials. This material interplay also calls for mind and bodily extensions into the physical world (Clark and Chalmers 2010) – a human-object relation that is impacting on one and another and a cultural expression that goes beyond the human and shapes societies (MacDougall 2006).

The perspective presented by Dant emphasises phenomenological perceptions and how they help to build-up the know-how interaction between humans and objects. However, one cannot expect things to go perfectly every time. He gives the example of when a misfit ball-joint interrupts the material interplay of the repairing session (Dant 2005: 122-128). Instead, the man picks up his phone to make a phone call on how to fix the situation and Dant describes this situation with the phone as a transformation of the man’s perceptual field that extends beyond the garage. What Dant fails to highlight is the impact by the people in the nearby area. Within *raggare*, there is always a helping hand close by and this is partly because of the high knowledge level among them, and partly because of the close kinship between *raggare*. This can take place both on the site, but also online. When one has the necessity to ask for help, new relations are built as those who might not have the specific skills needed might know someone else to contact and later the favor is counted on to be returned. ”That is a wonderful thing about this culture. (...) These are incredibly good people. The majority are very nice. There is a cohesion unlike anywhere else” Magnus told me. Hence, I believe the passion for the objects, the feelings and phenomenology they evoke is constituted in *the sensory enchantment of materiality* that connects *raggare*.

6.3.3 Summary: Garages as Sites for Social and Material Enchantment

In conclusion, garages can be understood as a micro-universe for friendship, sharing, knowledge and being productive. But these sites are not just places for social experiences: they are sites of the complex social-material engagements, where the social aesthetics are made. In the garage, this becomes evident, with their senses highly affected by their surroundings. *Raggare* embrace this and learn in this social landscape (MacDougall 2006). Furthermore, the interaction between *raggare*-car-tools is a highly intimate action that turns into extensions of body and mind. Coming back to Niklas' quote that *raggarbilar* are not man-made and that is why the cars are perceived differently from modern cars, is perhaps because of the knowledge of the technical skills involved into the making of the cars, as well *raggare* having their own experience of material interaction. This plays an immense part in the perception towards the cars which too creates a greater respect towards them. Garages are thus a place not only for being enchanted by the cars, but also a place for social enchantment between *raggare* as a result of the cars' ability to bond people together.

CONCLUSIONS – THE ENCHANTMENT OF CARS

The *raggar* subculture has a unique history that has lived on for many decades yet is still an unexplored territory in academia despite its cultural and social significance in Swedish society. This thesis has aimed to give a nuanced perspective on the culture by exploring the sensuous relationship between *raggare* and *raggarbilar*, asking how cars create social bonds.

By analyzing the cars through the lens of material culture and materiality (Miller 1993; 2005), along with the concept of *the humanity of the car* (Miller 2001) that helps to explore how cars are an integral part of the cultural and social landscape, I have shown an alternative view of how relational aspects of objects can impact on humans, culture, and society. This was achieved through sensory methodology (Pink 2015, Merleau-Ponty 2012, Stoller 1989) and microscale ethnographic observations in garages as well as semi-structured interviews to examine how the *raggarbilar* are being talked about, felt, understood, and fascinated within the subculture. Lastly, I used visual instruments to get a better grasp of how the senses and the cars are being perceived (Rose and Tolia-Kelly 2012).

Thus, by analyzing the materiality of objects, together with Alfred Gell's *technology of enchantment* (1992) that describes how objects – through a two-way mediation – can impose and captivate people, I have shown how we can get a greater understanding of how cars as objects are becoming meaningful and creating people, which, in this case, is how to become *raggare*. Furthermore, The Gellian approach has been inspired by sensory methodology and expanded to include sensory elements – my concept of *the sensory enchantment of materiality* – to explain the interconnectedness between senses, objects, and phenomenology. Aesthetics, embodiment, and nostalgia are examples of such elements that enhance this notion and thus, help to distinguish *raggarbilar* from other cars.

Cars connect people through their sensuous elements which I argue are tied to the shared phenomenological experience of cars. The first memory of a *raggarbil*, as it was expressed, “can never be washed away”, hence the car as an object has the ability to put a spell on people. The sensuous experiences of cars create a kinship between *raggare* because of a shared fascination of *raggarbilar* – one that is provoked by the *social agency* of the cars and thus, it is an enchanting quality that distinguishes *raggarbilar* from other cars. Furthermore, I have argued that *raggarbilar* are multi-sensory objects and this is emerged and manifested in different ways: the first gaze of a car's aesthetic, the touch of the steering wheel while driving, to hear rumbling sound the engine starting, and the smell of gas and oil inside a garage are just

a few examples of the overall experiences that these cars bring to the culture and are shared between *raggare*. Hence, it emerges through an intimate interaction with cars.

In a way, the *raggarbilar* themselves have been interlocutors which also adds to how anthropomorphized objects have *social agency* (Gell 1998) and bring affection to people. The car is not only a sentient object but also expressing its own agency that puts a spell on *raggare* – making people feel different states of emotions: happy, calm, comfort, as well as the experience of embodiment. Thus, cars, through their attributes, become companions for people which shapes peoples' social relation to objects as well as other humans.

My overall conclusion is that the senses play a huge part of how this subculture embraces cars as well as each other, thus the sensuous elements of cars help to shape social relations and are accounting for the subculture's vibrant presence in Swedish society and continue to do so. The cars, too, through their agency, have the ability to give an impact on the next generation of *raggare* (Küchler 2002, Gilmore 1919), hence it is a strategy of cultural survival which cannot be compared to other cars.

This fieldwork was performed during a global pandemic, and I did my very best to get as close as possible to the people and the cars within the national guidelines of what was possible at the time. Some sensory elements, such as the visual, have been more evident throughout the research because of my limited access during Covid-19. I encourage other researchers to investigate further the role of senses and phenomenology within the material culture discipline because of my own inadequacy to fully reach this notion. This could for example be done by passenger-seat ethnography during crusings (cf. Dawson 2015, Laurier et al. 2008), and participant observations at car festivals to get a deeper understanding of cars but also other objects for a deeper sensuous exploration, using *the sensory enchantment of materiality*. More in-depth research about engendered materials would contribute with refreshing insights to material culture as this was not evident during the writing of this project.

For further studies on *raggare*, I encountered issues of generational boundaries and environmental perspectives that could possibly impact on the future of the *raggar* subculture, thus I advocate others to examine these matters moreover as they could affect how *raggarbilar* are being understood sensuously henceforward. Furthermore, Miller's (2001) emphasis on intersectional analysis in relation to *raggarbilar* could bring interesting results on sociopolitical matters and its impact for cultural and social outcomes in Swedish society and beyond.

Growing up with the culture, I never fully embraced the culture and even though I cannot say I have been enchanted in the same way as the people I have met throughout this research, I have since come to appreciate it as a unique cultural phenomenon tied intimately to me, my

family, and who I have become in ways I like and dislike. Nevertheless, I hope I have managed to capture the feeling of the *raggarbil* a bit closer as well as given some nuanced views of this fascinating subculture. *Raggare* deserves more attention in academia as they have a lot to teach us about culture, materials, and friendships. They truly have done that to me.

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