

BOOK REVIEW

The cultural life of Automobile: roads of cinetic modernity *Giucci, Guillermo, editor (2007), University of Quilmes Press*

The present review focuses on the work of Guillermo Guicci regarding the cultural and historical life of automobile in modernity, an interesting research published recently in 2007 by the University of Quilmes Press, Argentina. On his introductory chapter, author argues that cars symbolized a social upward for people who lived in the lapse from 1900 to 1940. Following this, he sees in the car, a machine which has transcended the boundaries of economies, languages and times. Basically, this new invention not only saved the time of many workers but also entailed new paradigms associated to more freedom, prestige, independence and autonomy. Most certainly, automobile should be seriously considered as a way of emancipation that has been characterized the life of many generations throughout the world.

Under such a context, in first chapter Guicci examines the historical origin of Henry Ford as the father of cars and mass-production. Even though Ford has not invented the automobile in such, he extended and developed its usage for all population inside United States and beyond. In general, declared as a staunch enemy of history, Ford decided to create a new cult that exacerbates the role played by technology and future in the life of lay-people. His success, of course, was associated to his intention to improve the style of life in consumers who were relegated to peripheral position in the market. From Ford's point of view, a sustainable system of production should be only possible in combination with other factors such as: an increase in salaries and a subsequent rates reduction. Finally, in 1942 Ford released his book entitled *My life and Work* wherein he emphasized that work was part of human's nature as well as technology was a vehicle towards the happiness and development. However, his thesis rested on shaky foundations.

In the second and third chapter, Guicci addresses the question as to whether the Ford's industries fascinated people within United States. In particular, Ford encouraged tours-related yields wherein visitors can observe how a car was assembled. These sites promptly were visited by



miles of tourists who contemplated astonished how these devices were created following the pattern of rationality. Like in Taylor and Fayol, Management literature owes an immense gratitude to Ford because he was the first owner in promoting a coordinated performance at work. Even though, there was not occurred a set of conditions for the expansion of cars in the third-world, outside United States, distributors sold their products from Rhodesia to China. In the case of Latin America, wherein the instable political regimes in combination with a poor road net, the automobile was not adopted until 1930. The moot point here was that local managers not only were astonished by the opportunities of this device, but also they travelled to Detroit to learn the different involved processes in assembly. For 1960, the society takes a critical view about automobile since certain problems such as traffic jams, accidents and pollution surface. In regards to this, crashes cars, a popular game among our children, was an invention of Ralph Nader who concerned about the risks of driving. For other hand, Giucci reminds us that from that decade onwards, many scholars devoted considerable attention in studying the negative effects of cars in daily social life, ranging from Braudillard to McLuhan. That way, terms such as alienation, mass-consumption, capitalism, human's degradation and destruction are some association that scholars and journalists linked to automobile.

For that reason, it is not surprising that in fourth chapter, our author analyzes the different factors that constituted cars in a symbol of mass-consumption in our modern times. At a first glance, aristocracies began to drive long distances as a form of social prestige and distinction. Undoubtedly, novelty played a pivotal role in such a process. Secondly, sellers organized public events such as traces and exhibitions in the different cities of Latin America with the end of promotion and advertising. As a result of this, automobile was a thing notably valorized as an instrument for people to demonstrate their outstanding feats; routine and monotony in daily work found in driving a new way of recreation. A couple of year later, it became in a sign of sport and healthy whenever the first international trace, Paris-Bordeaux-Paris, appeared in 1985.

Lastly, in posterior chapters Giucci brings into view that automobile jeopardizes the role played by tradition and static since it promises a new form of mobility wherein the symbolic distinction prevails. Rapidly, nature is being transformed as a tourist attraction and at the hands of cars emerge the camping grounds self-oriented to recreation and resting purposes. Just there, where certain distrust characterized the view of people against primitivism, today natural and stenographic landscapes are lived as a form of staged-authenticity.

Giucci emphasizes that technological advances follow a previous and contradictory dynamic of production and acquisition. It is not surprising that inventions imply a tension between groups which pursue traditional and social upward interests. Even if, as he acknowledges the automobile was an inescapable reality in the inception of XX century, the promises of social upward wakes up resistance and distrust of conservative sectors. In consequence, advertising investments aims at imposing the mass-consumption as a form of emulating success while automobile diversifies into many models and sizes. Each one of them had a clear message: displacement was not only a way to divide the importance of people but also a ritual for achieving the happiness. As a whole, Giucci once and once again throughout the book argues that automobile in western –and the world- generated a real technical-productive revolution wherein legal-rational logic paved the pathway for the advent of cinetic modernity.

We have so far highlighted all points of this interesting book as objective as possible. Also we strongly believe that professor Giucci had the enough merits to consider his work as one of best studies of automobile written in Spanish. Basing his observations on a combination of historical, bibliographical, photographic and literature evidence, Giucci sets forward a well-researched investigation relating the historical background of modernity and automobile. Nevertheless, some issues should be re-considered in the light of a critical point of view. From a general perspective, after further examination Giucci does not explain how and why automobile worked as a reproducer of modernity by imposing cultural changes such as the passion for vertigo and speed. In part, that seems to be the point since author gives excessive importance to the role played by this engine in the modernity's inception. As one of many other technical advances, the automobile is not other thing than a part of a broader process which culminates with capitalism. Secondly, this work would be improved whether author introduces in his development statistical information regarding the level of production in the time-frame he is considering. In other words, there is no evidence that outlines a scientific correlation between the emergence of automobile and modernity. From the beginning to the end, Giucci handles a set of narrations and tales that sound convincing and intend cyclically about the same, but do not prove the afore-mentioned hypothesis.

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