

From Hitler to Hippies: The Volkswagen Bus in America

by

David Dyer Burnett, B.A.

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of The University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin
May 2002

From Hitler to Hippies: The Volkswagen Bus in America

APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Janet Davis

Jeffrey Meikle

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
Chapter One: Volkswagens in Germany.....	13
Chapter Two: Coming to America.....	32
Chapter Three: The Pre-Hippie Bus.....	56
Chapter Four: The Flowering of the Hippie Bus.....	92
Chapter Five: Building the Legacy.....	131
Conclusion: The Volkswagen Bus in a New Millennium.....	163
Annotated Source List.....	185
Vita.....	206

Introduction

If you don't want to be dependent on motels, if you like to stop for a day or a week where the trout are biting or the view is straight out of a travel folder, look out! This homely vehicle could cause you to quit your job, sell your house, or otherwise lose control.

— “Volkswagen Camper,” *Motor Trend*, October 1956.

I decided to study Volkswagen buses for my master's thesis soon after beginning graduate studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Contrary to common assumption, I do not own, nor have I ever owned, a Volkswagen bus. My interest in this vehicle developed elsewhere, as an offshoot of my longstanding personal and academic attachment to the contemporary and historical American counterculture, in all its myriad forms. Initially, I planned to study Volkswagen buses primarily in relation to hippie culture, exploring the substantial linkages between car and culture therein. To enrich and diversify my study, I have since expanded the historical scope of this project to include the pre- and post-hippie history of the bus, in 1950s Germany and the contemporary era, to appreciate long-term changes in the culture of Volkswagen buses.

Nevertheless, I continue to feel most passionate about Volkswagen buses' connection to hippie culture, in patterns of use and in mediated representation. Because of this interest, and because of the overwhelmingly

hippie-oriented legacy of the bus, that connection recurs throughout this paper. The core question of my ongoing study is this: how did the bus (and the “Beetle,” secondarily¹) become actually and iconographically linked during the sixties with the hippie counterculture, and how did that association evolve over time? How can the bus enrich our understanding of the hippie counterculture?

Volkswagen buses constitute an excellent research subject, given their colorful and resonant place in modern American culture. Their iconic status in contemporary America makes their neglect by academics particularly surprising. To my knowledge, I am the first person to write on Volkswagen buses academically, though a handful of pictorial histories of the vehicle have been published.² To my chagrin, most history and photo books on Volkswagens focus on the Beetle, and “Volkswagen” by default

¹ To clarify the terminology: the “Volkswagen bus” I refer to is the Volkswagen Transporter, as it is officially known. The model carries various additional names, including the “microbus” (in Europe), the “station wagon” (the informal name given it by Volkswagen of America), the “van” (equivalent to “bus”), or the “Type 2.” For simplicity, I generally use its most common colloquial name, the “bus,” though in the first chapter, on Volkswagens in Germany, I use the official name “Transporter” designated by the corporation. Also important to note, the Transporter platform has seen much variation over the years. Models include the luxury “deluxe” passenger car, with 23 windows and an enormous sunroof), the “Kombi” economy transporter, camper vehicles, single- and double-cab pickups, panel vans, and assorted emergency- and trade-vehicle specialties. Again for simplicity, in this paper I will not distinguish among these variations unless noted, because their cultural imagery is generally interchangeable. The “Type 2” Transporter followed the “Type 1” sedan, named the “Beetle” or “bug” in this country. I use “Beetle” and “bug” interchangeably as well, because they are semantically equivalent.

² See “Volkswagen Histories” under “Secondary Source Materials” in the Appendix.

generally refers to that car. Several helpful histories have been written on Volkswagens, including Walter Henry Nelson's *Small Wonder*, K.B. Hopfinger's *The Volkswagen Story*, and Dan Post *Volkswagen Nine Lives Later, 1930-1965*,³ but these generally focus on the corporation rather than the culture of the automobiles, and none of them is analytical. The extant academic treatment of Volkswagens as a whole is limited to a chapter on their advertising in Thomas Frank's *Conquest of Cool*.⁴

As I shall illustrate further, soon after Volkswagen buses were first imported into this country, in 1959, they began to acquire a reputation as a vehicle for liberals and nontraditionalists. This reputation deepened with the bus's adoption by the hippie counterculture, becoming more pronounced as younger and less respectable owners overshadowed its historical popularity among middle-class families (albeit liberal ones). The vehicle has since become a core symbol of the 1960s cultural revolution and of hippie culture, a rolling metaphor with variously positive or negative connotations, depending on the beholder. Given the original purpose of this vehicle in 1950s Germany, as a no-frills compliment to the passenger sedan,

³ Walter Henry Nelson, *Small Wonder: The Amazing Story of the Volkswagen* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965); K.B. Hopfinger, *The Volkswagen Story* (Cambridge, MA: R. Bentley, 1971); Dan Post, *Volkswagen Nine Lives Later, 1930-1965* (Arcadia, CA: Motor-Era Books, 1966).

⁴ Thomas Frank. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

the aesthetic and functional contrast between the German bus and its hippie offspring is striking, though not surprising given the difference in cultural contexts.

The easiest and least interesting way to explain the cultural evolution from German utility vehicle to American hippie bus would be to claim, rightly, that each simply reflects the tempo and tone of its respective historical era. In the former case, the years immediately following World War II in Germany were economically, politically, and culturally unsettled in the wake of a devastating war. The development of the Volkswagen Transporter and sedan addressed an infrastructural and psychological need for economical, utilitarian vehicles to help Germany to its feet again. In the late sixties in America and beyond, rebellious and nomadic youth adopted the buses because they were cheap, functional, and distinctive. The dual appeals of the bus, both its practicality and its fashionable image, reinforced one another and thus closely intertwined Volkswagen buses with the modern culture of bohemian travel.

In this thesis, I will trace the development of bus culture over its fifty-year history, identifying the similarities and differences between

different eras.⁵ After all, a brightly-painted Volkswagen bus is still a Volkswagen, and a hippie bus holds much in common with the more conservative older buses – most obviously in mechanics and economics, but also to some degree in usage and attitude. In chapter one I explain the development of the Volkswagen corporation and the Transporter model, its cultural location in postwar Germany, and the bus’s evolution in image and use during the 1950s from a utilitarian truck to a family-oriented pleasure vehicle. Chapter two explains the process of bringing Volkswagens to this country, and the difficulty the corporation faced as a German automaker in early postwar America.

In chapter three I describe how, though the profile of bus owners stayed the same in America as in Germany, consisting largely of leisure-oriented middle-class families, in this country the bus’s “otherness” gave bus culture a quirkiness that appealed specifically to nontraditionalists. Besides the unusual styling and foreign origin of the bus, it stood out from American cars by being plain, economical, and practical. American cars of the era tended toward oversized, flashy designs that were more expensive.

⁵ By “bus culture” I mean the use and perception of Volkswagen buses, the cultural dialogue surrounding their use, their representation in various media, and their relation to the wider culture of the time. Historical attitudes toward buses are preserved in diverse cultural artifacts, including corporate products (in particular advertisements and brochures), books written explicitly about buses and Volkswagens generally, and representations of the bus in literature and popular media.

Customers who were attracted by these qualities and who were willing to accept or ignore its quirky reputation foreshadowed the later hippies with their nontraditional attitude toward consumption, as manifested by their choice of vehicle.

In chapter four I discuss how the hippie counterculture that flowered in the late sixties latched onto the Volkswagen bus for the same reasons that attracted earlier owners, for a combination of practical and stylistic reasons. Because hippie owners were younger and more adventuresome than previous owners, and tended to purchase older secondhand buses, they drastically elevated the exuberance, singularity, and borderline deviance of bus culture. Buses became a highly visible accessory to the hippie lifestyle; they were painted, traveled in, and lived in, and became associated with partying, friends, sex, drugs, and adventure. They developed into a recognizable icon of hippie culture through real-world application and increasing media representation. I discuss this era following the initial hippie connection, between the seventies and the nineties, in chapter five.

I conclude by considering the place of Volkswagen buses in contemporary America. The marked decline of the American hippie counterculture in the 1990s parallels a gradual waning in the culture of hippie buses, as these vehicles age and die and as the lifestyle that

supported them fades. Nevertheless, nostalgia for the 1960s era and nostalgia for the slimming ranks of old buses have enhanced an ethic of preservation within bus culture. Buses are becoming increasingly removed from the realm of everyday use, while becoming increasingly glorified in collector's circles. At the same time, their association with hippie culture continues unabated in film and advertising, though this nostalgic and stereotypical media preservation only underscores their increasing distance from everyday life.

The Volkswagen corporation has become similarly evocative in reinterpreting old car designs, as with the New Beetle model and the Microbus prototype. With Volkswagen, of course, their emphasis on their countercultural legacy is suspect as potentially opportunistic and insincere, purely a marketing initiative. In any case, it is clear that the mechanical and aesthetic oddity that once distinguished Volkswagen automobiles from American ones—the rear-mounted, air-cooled engines; the boxy bus design and rounded Beetle design—has passed, so Volkswagen's reputation now derives in greater degree from making reference to their colorful past. While Volkswagen buses and Beetles carried a reputation as anticonsumerist commodities, given their valuation of economy over style,

function over form, contemporary Volkswagens are actually overpriced compared to vans of similar size and quality.

* * *

The history of Volkswagen buses can teach us about America. First, we must agree that the Volkswagen bus is a contemporary American icon, with a notoriety and cultural legacy that evokes important values and cultural strains. The deeply rooted and long-lasting stereotypes of bus culture are seductive precisely because they evoke the symbolic resonance of this vehicle with wider cultural trends – namely hippie culture – and with deeper American values. As this thesis makes clear, the importance of Volkswagen buses is linked to the counterculture in its various stages of evolution, in its late-sixties hippie manifestation and in the 1950s and 1960s as a vehicle for forward-thinking families.

The common cultural strain linking these eras of bus culture is anticonsumerism. The hippie ethic, most particularly, revolved around a rejection of a middle-class standard of living and the materialistic, consumerist ideology that underlay it. Hippies were viewed as a threat to American society, among other reasons because they disavowed the dominant consumerist hegemony of American culture. The Beats experienced the same stigmatism in the fifties, for “dropping out” to pursue

artistic lifestyles outside the margins of respectability. Burroughs pursued heroin, Ginsburg poetry, and Kerouac fraternized with migrant laborers and others on the social margins. For the hippies, dropping out meant escaping a buy-and-spend paradigm, choosing a less money-intensive and less commodity-intensive lifestyle centered on bartering, home production of goods and services, “voluntary poverty,” and “voluntary simplicity.”

The bus, because it prioritized function over form and because the hippies adopted it for that reason, came to symbolize the anticonsumerist ethic. However, lest we neglect the pre-hippie history of the bus, we must also recognize that the preeminently pragmatic appeal characterizes its entire history. The fact that so many owners in the fifties and sixties were attracted to the bus for its spaciousness, fuel economy, and other practical attributes, and that they overlooked or embraced its strangeness relative to most American cars, suggests that the anticonsumerist counterculture had much wider and more populist roots than usually recognized.

It is possible, of course, that the thrifty ethic that characterizes Volkswagen bus culture is not antithetical at all. Indeed, economy is an all-American value as well, and a primary motivating principle in consumer

behavior.⁶ This all-American element of bus culture does not contradict its rebellion, however, but merely reiterates the complexity of its iconic status. The contradictory symbolic appeal of the Volkswagen bus, which can represent irresponsible deviance or romantic adventure depending on the context, reflects a conflicted attitude toward fundamental cultural norms in America. Bus culture and the hippie culture with which it is closely intertwined are alternately celebrated or demonized because their rejection of mainstream America both attracts and repels people. We celebrate these cultural strains for representing freedom, independence, and individualism but demonize them for being aberrant by reneging on Americans' implicit social contract. Hippies are elevated and excluded at the same time, romanticized but ostracized. Volkswagen bus culture manifests this same cultural-outsider status.

Ultimately, romanticizing or criticizing hippies and their buses constitutes "othering" them and their values, making them outsiders. Either way, this othering is a way of disempowering and neutralizing their nonconformist ideologies. Indeed, by exaggerating the otherness of Volkswagen bus culture, by playing up the stereotypical differentiation and

⁶ See Simon Straus, *History of the Thrift Movement in America* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1920).

excesses of this group, the anticonsumerism represented by this cultural strain seems even more impractical, even more inaccessible to the mainstream. Mainstream Americans may think that only hippies, only the most extreme representatives of that counterculture, can embrace that lifestyle and its antithetical values. In this light, the symbolic appeal of hippie culture in the last several decades of American history, its iconic status, may symptomize the failure of the late-sixties counterculture. What began as a revolution of the mind, an attitudinal reorientation toward new ethical and behavioral norms, over time became simplified and externalized into a stereotypical, superficial, one-dimensional version of that culture. The ideology and cultural activity underlying that revolution has declined while its stylistic appeal increases. More charitably, the pervasiveness of hippie-bus imagery could represent the at least partial acceptance of this lifestyle within the American mainstream, though the one-dimensional and often derogatory representation of this lifestyle suggests otherwise.

These issues of symbolism, cultural difference, and consumerism recur throughout the history of Volkswagen buses and throughout this thesis. As you read, consider the characteristics of bus culture and the values underlying it, with an eye to the complex and varied relationship of this subculture to the American hippie counterculture and to mainstream

America. As stated above, my own conclusion is that Volkswagen bus culture represents both positive and negative values, equally tied to its symbolic rejection of the American consumerist paradigm.

Chapter One: Volkswagens in Germany

The Volkswagen Transporter, or “bus,” was not born until 1947, when a Dutch Volkswagen distributor conceived it, but the history of the Volkswagen corporation begins much earlier. Ferdinand Porsche, an iconoclastic German automobile engineer, is responsible for designing the early prototypes of the Volkswagen “Beetle,” the original Volkswagen automobile. He worked during the first decades of the twentieth century on developing an affordable mass-produced German sedan, convinced that economical and low-maintenance vehicles would occupy a central role in the future of the German auto industry.

Porsche’s vision of a *Volkswagen*, or “people’s car,” echoes the earlier efforts of Henry Ford and his best-selling Model T, and in fact Porsche admired and was inspired by Ford. Only in 1972 did Volkswagen’s Beetle surpass the Model T as the best-selling auto ever, with over 15 million sold worldwide.⁷ Unlike Ford and the Model T, however, Porsche made streamlining a priority in his small-car designs, reflecting his experience with racing cars as well as mirroring a wider trend in industrial design of the modern era. As Rolf Sachasse explains in an essay from the

⁷ *Volkswagen Writes History: A Chronicle of Facts and Pictures – From the Past to the Present* (N.p., printed in Germany, 1996).

photography collection *A Week at the Volkswagen Factory*, “The design of the VW Beetle... is rooted in aesthetic concepts of the Thirties, which grew out of the avant-garde of previous decades.”⁸

In the decade of the 1900s, Porsche worked for the Austro-Daimler corporation as its technical director, developing racing cars before forming his own company to develop a small economy car. Various characteristics of his designs aided efficiency while distinguishing them from more conventional vehicles, indicating an inclination toward quirky practicality that has attached to Volkswagen’s reputation ever since. For example, Porsche moved the engine in his prototypes to the rear of the car, which simplified the mechanics and aided traction by distributing the vehicle’s weight more evenly. He also used air-cooled engines rather than the standard water-cooled designs, eliminating the need for radiators, hoses, and related equipment and thus reducing overall weight and complexity. Porsche’s use of air-cooled engines hints at his ambitious vision as much as his practicality, because such engines could operate reliably in sub-freezing or very hot temperatures and were thus suited to worldwide applications.

⁸ Peter Keetman, *A Week at the Volkswagen Factory: Photographs from April 1953* (London: Dirk Nishen Publishing, 1987), 7.

If not for the intervention of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party, the Volkswagen Beetle might never have entered production. Porsche had completed several prototypes of small Beetle-shaped cars as early as 1930, but these designs were never produced because of the worldwide depression of that decade. However, the future Beetle's fate changed considerably in 1933, when the Nazi government approached Porsche and contracted him to develop a small car design. Hitler, elected as Reich Chancellor on January 30th of that year, shared Porsche's belief in a small car for the people. Playing nationalist and populist politics, Hitler had promised the German people a mass-produced economy car. Indeed, his appeal among the German populace was founded upon such promises of quality-of-life improvements, in an era of economic weakness and general demoralization. In 1933 Hitler named the people's car the *Kraft durch Freude (KdF) Wagen*, literally translated as the "Strength-Through-Joy Car," but in 1935 he adopted the tamer Volkswagen label.

Hitler set unreasonably high expectations upon Porsche for the car's fuel efficiency, maximum speed, and selling price, owing no doubt to the leader's overzealous optimism and inexperience with automobile design. At a time when Henry Ford was mass-producing the Model T at a manufacturing cost equivalent to 2640 German marks, Hitler wanted

Porsche to build a car for 900 marks in production costs, to sell for an equivalent of \$360.⁹ The budget was so tight that Porsche's team developed the prototypes in his own garage.¹⁰ Hitler envisioned the Volkswagen as a sturdy and simple vehicle, cheap to build yet capable of driving long distances without mechanical difficulties and under a variety of driving conditions. With these characteristics, the Chancellor (and Führer after August 2, 1934) was no doubt anticipating future wartime as well as civilian applications.

With extensive trial and error, including exhaustive road tests performed by German soldiers, Hitler announced a working Volkswagen prototype in May 1938. On the same day he attended a cornerstone-laying ceremony for the future Volkswagen manufacturing plant in Wolfsburg. The factory site, which was commandeered by the Nazis from a private estate, was chosen for its proximity to railroad routes and its comfortable distance from Germany's enemies on the western border. The factory was funded by a savings scheme begun in 1939, in which hopeful German citizens paid regular installments toward the price of a Volkswagen in

⁹ Frank Rowsome, Jr., *Think Small: The Story of those Volkswagen Ads* (Brattleboro, VT: Stephen Greene Press, 1970), 31.

¹⁰ Hopfinger, 81.

return for special government-issued stamps, supposedly redeemable for a car at some time in the future.

World War II, begun with Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, interrupted the dreams of those 330,000 investors and drastically affected the future of the Volkswagen. Production of the Beetle, which only began in August 1940, ground to a halt soon after while the Wolfsburg factory was redirected toward production of military vehicles, including the Beetle-based *Kubelwagen* jeep and *Schwimmwagen* amphibian. Almost all the prewar investors, meanwhile, never received their Volkswagen.

As a major German industrial resource, the Wolfsburg factory was targeted in Allied bombing and almost completely destroyed by the end of World War II. The plant was abandoned and plundered by the Germans before that region of Germany was turned over to the British in 1945. Under British supervision, the plant was slowly rebuilt during postwar reconstruction to provide the Allied occupying forces with much-needed transportation. The low maintenance and rugged performance of the *Kubelwagen*, in particular, was enough to overcome any aversion among the Allies to using German vehicles. Conditions in the ravaged plant were crude, however. *Time* magazine reported, "Falling bricks were a constant

menace; live wires lay tangled in the mess.... Eight thousand refugees and former soldiers grubbed about in the ruins. Half were cleaning up rubble; the others were virtually hand-tooling a few vehicles for the British occupation army.”¹¹ The British returned the factory to the German government on January 1, 1948, after Allied governments – and even Henry Ford – declined the offer to take responsibility for it. Back under German control, the Wolfsburg factory returned to mass production of the Beetle that year.¹²

The Transporter, or “Type 2” – named after the Beetle, the original Type 1 – arose from these fledgling postwar ashes. Ben Pon, a Dutchman who in 1947 became the first foreign distributor of the Volkswagen, and who in 1949 exported the first Beetle to the United States, originated the Transporter design. Observing the Beetle-derived flat-bed trucks used in the Wolfsburg factory to move equipment, Pon was inspired to design an all-purpose utility truck. In a now-legendary notebook sketch, dated April 23, 1947, Pon drew a breadloaf-shaped truck featuring a rear engine and forward seating to maximize interior volume.¹³

¹¹ “Comeback in the West.” *Time*, Feb. 15, 1954, p.85.

¹² Rowsome, 41.

¹³ Reprinted in Keith Seume and Michael Steinke, *VW Bus: The First 50 Years, 1949-1999*. Osceola, WI: MBI Publishing, 1999. p.10. The spiral notebook containing the drawing is now housed at the Volkswagen AutoMuseum in Wolfsburg, Germany.

Colonel Charles Radclyffe, the British officer who oversaw the Wolfsburg factory, initially rejected Pon's suggestion for a new product line because in 1947 the factory was operating at maximum capacity. However, after Germany received control of the factory in 1948, the new Volkswagen chief executive, Heinz Nordhoff, enthusiastically accepted Pon's idea for a truck. After successful trials in May 1949, Nordhoff announced that he wanted the Transporter in production by the end of that year. In fact, Nordhoff reduced production of the Beetle in order to accommodate assembly of the bus, even though orders for the Beetle were backlogged.¹⁴

The first Transporter came off the assembly line in February 1950, and mass production began the next month. In the first year, the rate of production increased from ten vehicles a day to sixty, and the corporation built a plant specifically for bus production in the mid-fifties.¹⁵ Nordhoff also oversaw improvements in the Beetle; in the years following his hiring, the Beetle grew quieter and received a larger engine and better shocks.¹⁶ Production levels of the Beetle doubled each year in the postwar years, surpassing one million ten years later.¹⁷

¹⁴ Steve Spence, "The Van of Aquarius," *Car and Driver*, March 1, 1992: 87.

¹⁵ *Volkswagen Writes History*; Lawrence Meredith, *Volkswagen Transporter: The Complete Story* (Marlborough, England: Crowood Press, 1998), 16.

¹⁶ *Time*, 1954.

¹⁷ Rowsome, 41.

Volkswagen's enormous success was due in part to high morale among workers. Nordhoff fostered community spirit among the employees and promoted himself as a "man of the people," in part by staging frequent workers' meetings for the entire factory. The executive himself spoke to the cooperative effort underlying Volkswagen production, declaring, "Labor and management must be united into one big group that depends on the same success."¹⁸

The design of the initial Transporter prototypes went largely unchanged for decades to come. The truck's distinctive shape, spacious interior, versatility, and impressive economy ensured a good reputation from its inception. With the cab positioned over the front wheels and the engine between the rear wheels, the entire middle area was opened up for passenger or cargo space. A reinforced Beetle chassis and even weight distribution between driver and engine allowed the Transporter to carry a remarkable load of 1830 pounds, close to its own weight. Particularly given that the Transporter shared the Beetle's wheelbase, and only stretched eight inches longer overall, its carrying capacity was even more impressive. A stylishly raked nose offset the vehicle's boxiness, and large headlights and an even larger VW emblem created a friendly façade. Inside, the

¹⁸ *Time*, 1954.

accommodations were spartan, with exposed metal, bus-like bench seats, and a single instrument, a speedometer, in the dash. (When the gas tank sputtered dry, a lever allowed the driver to release an extra liter of fuel while looking for a place to refuel).

The first Volkswagen buses featured a diminutive 36-horsepower engine, providing sluggish acceleration and a maximum speed of 50 mph. However, because the Transporter was originally intended for localized use as a delivery truck, work truck, and passenger car, the small engine was quite sufficient. The engine was fuel efficient due to its size, receiving between 25 and 30 mpg even when fully loaded, and its size and lightness allowed for easy removal and maintenance. (Through the seventies, the Volkswagen company prided itself on the fact that an owner could remove, repair, and reinstall a Volkswagen engine by hand.) The weak engine was also acceptable because in 1950s Germany, speed limits as well as customers' expectations for engine performance were drastically lower than today. Nevertheless, from the beginning the Transporter has been notoriously underpowered compared to other vehicles.

In 1950, part of the Transporter's appeal lay in the underdevelopment of its light-truck market segment. The handful of comparable commercial vehicles available in Europe at mid-century were

much less reliable and less efficient than the Transporter. As Malcolm Bobbitt writes in his history of the Volkswagen bus, “At that time, in Germany and the rest of Europe, there really was nothing to compare it with, much of the home market relying on odd machines... which enjoyed little in the way of sophistication or traction and roadholding abilities.”¹⁹ Seume and Steinke offer a similar interpretation of the Transporter’s fortuitous entry into the automotive market: “Rival vehicles were crude, slow, noisy, and thoroughly uncomfortable by comparison, and the press reports [for the Transporter] must have made their manufacturers squirm.”²⁰ The Transporter was an instant hit in Germany, and its popularity later spread around the world.

The early-fifties marketing for the Transporter and Beetle, apart from factory promotional photos, consisted of highly stylized drawings created by an artist named Bernd Reuters. Reuters’s imagery exaggerated the curves and length of the vehicles, reinforcing the streamlining of their design. His Volkswagens were invariably shown in rapid motion, speeding across the page with a purposefulness that reflected how the vehicles

¹⁹ Malcolm Bobbitt, *VW Bus: Camper, Van, Bus, Pick-up, Wagon* (Dorchester, England: Veloce Publishing, 1997), 27.

²⁰ Seume and Steinke, 9.

represented progress and faith in the future of postwar Germany.²¹ Whether showing tradesmen rushing to the jobsite, full of confidence and satisfaction, or a vanful of happy recreationalists whizzing up a mountain road, the drawings sent a powerful message: German life was steadily improving, and the Volkswagen Transporter and Beetle would play an important role in that betterment.

The Transporter in particular was able to satisfy a range of commercial and leisure-time applications, as Reuters's drawings made clear. One memorable image sums up the qualities of progress and versatility represented by the bus. In it, six different varieties of the Transporter race together across the page. An unobtrusive red arrow runs below them, indicating the direction of prosperity, happiness, and tranquility in postwar Germany. Ironically, Volkswagen's heavy-handed and stylized imagery of the early fifties evoked the same tone as earlier Nazi propaganda, in an era when the country was trying hard to move beyond that disreputable history.

In 1950, Volkswagen offered the Transporter as a panel van or passenger bus. The panel van, with a bare-metal cargo hold, was intended

²¹ For more on streamlining, see Jeffrey Meikle, *Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-1939* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979).

for tradesmen, and could be modified at the factory for any number of specific needs (i.e. fitted with shelves for a baker or racks for a dry-cleaner). Behind a front bench seat, the cavernous cargo space was diminished only by the raised platform of the engine compartment, situated between the rear wheels. Among commercial vehicles of its era, the Transporter pioneered the use of side-loading doors to supplement access from the rear, making loading and unloading considerably easier. The first passenger buses were marketed as the Kombi, a base-level van with seating for nine in three rows of bench seats, similar in layout and size to contemporary minivans. Its removable benches allowed for both commercial and passenger applications.

Shortly after the panel van and Kombi debuted, the Microbus, a mid-range passenger van, entered the market, followed a year later, in April 1951, by the Microbus De Luxe, or “Samba.” The De Luxe was elaborate, featuring 21 or 23 windows (including quarter-sized skylights above the side windows), a full-length canvas sunroof, two-tone paint and chrome trim, nicer seats, and a full instrument panel including a clock. In marketing the De Luxe, Volkswagen apparently recognized sufficient demand for a more expensive, more luxurious passenger vehicle.

In September 1952, the Volkswagen Pick-up entered the market, a version of the Transporter created by substituting a flat bed for the enclosed space behind the cab. Eventually the pickup was offered in single- or double-cab versions with a wide range of options. Other factory-modified specialty models that debuted early in the Transporter's history included ambulances, fire trucks, ladder trucks, high-roof vans, display vehicles, and hearses. Volkswagen offered up to 80 different body configurations for the Transporter, reflecting both the company's ambition to serve the entire commercial and private market, and the scarcity of other vehicular options. Aftermarket modifications diversified the Transporter's appearance and function further, with the creation of hamburger stands, freezer units, mobile shops, and others.²²

The most memorable version of the Transporter, and the one most responsible for creating the cult legacy of the Volkswagen bus, was the camper. Volkswagen contracted with Westfalia, a German coachbuilding company dating back to the 1850s, as their official aftermarket partner in converting standard minibuses to campers. The conversions, begun in 1952, cost several hundred dollars above the base price of a passenger

²² For more on Volkswagen's specialty Transporters, see Seume and Steinke's *VW Bus*, which focuses on unusual modifications.

Kombi. Inside, Westfalia replaced the Kombi's two forward-facing benches with a single bench that folded down to a double bed. In addition, two seats faced rearward in the Campmobile, with a collapsible dining table situated between the bench and seats. Underneath and on each side of the rear bench, cabinets and a mirrored closet provided space for storing clothes and bedding.

The list of amenities crammed into the small interior continues. Next to the door, a miniature kitchen provided a sink and refrigerator for basic food preparation. The hinged side doors contained shelving so that, when opened out at a campsite, they provided a pantry for cooking purposes. Some campers included tents or awnings that covered the doorway and extended the available living space, as did an optional self-supporting tent. Meanwhile, roof racks of varying sizes extended the bus's cargo space for traveling, as did an optional storage trailer. The campers provided comfortable facilities for short-term travel for small families, though later owners proved that one could live in buses for longer periods.²³

In coming years, dozens of other companies entered the market for Volkswagen camper conversions, though Westfalia remained the only

²³ See thesamba.com and vintagebus.com for illustrations of camper interiors and accessories.

officially contracted one, and Volkswagen officially approved only a handful of other companies over the years. The carmaker deemed some companies' modifications unsafe because they required removal of too much of the roof section to insert elevating canopies, which reduced the structural rigidity of the vehicle. Elevating roofs were popular among consumers because they increased comfort and livability inside the camper by allowing standing room and decreasing claustrophobic tendencies. In the fifties, Westfalias featured only skylights or small turret-like pop-tops, but by the sixties the company, and others, offered full-length elevating roofs.

Most camper modifications to the Volkswagen Transporter shared the same characteristics. Functional as a passenger vehicle for daily driving during the workweek, with ample seating and storage space, the campers found a second identity on weekends as an economical, albeit compact mobile home suitable for camping or road trips. The sleeping accommodations, shelving and storage space, and kitchen amenities were adequate for the short-term living needs of an average family.²⁴ At the same time, the car-sized proportions, fuel efficiency, and easy maintenance of the camper Transporters made them eminently practical. A living space

²⁴ See Bobbitt, pp. 77-96 for greater detail on varieties of camper conversions.

that small, with interior dimensions of only 13 by five feet, including the cab, seems unthinkable by contemporary standards. In the postwar years, however, with standards of living considerably lower than now, living spaces more compact, and families more close-knit, the camper was ideal.

By the 1970s, the demographics of people traveling and living out of Volkswagen buses had shifted from middle-class adults and families to youthful bohemians, as the former group moved to more spacious and luxurious travel accommodations. In 1950s Germany, however, with a weak but improving postwar economy and a populace eager to put the troubles of war behind them, the independence, intimacy, mobility, and relative economy of family vacations in the Volkswagen camper greatly appealed to the middle classes. Indeed, throughout the history of the automobile, as Roger White explains in *Home on the Road: The Motor Home in America*, personal cars have been associated with leisure. Those associations apply particularly to camping vehicles, which, except for their occasional association with vagabondism, such as during the Depression, have historically maintained a reputation as leisurely pleasure vehicles.²⁵

²⁵ Roger White, *Home on the Road: The Motor Home in America* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 90.

The Volkswagen campers were part of a postwar renaissance in leisure travel, in Germany but also throughout Europe and the United States. In Roger White's words:

In the late 1940s and 1950s a new autocamping boom created more demand for recreation vehicles as families, hunters, anglers, and others discovered the pleasures of outdoor living in their leisure time. Materials and housing shortages eased, and veterans and their families were settling into new, suburban homes. At the same time, people returned to the highways in search of fun and adventure. Sleeping in campgrounds and other outdoor settings promoted family intimacy, satisfied a desire to be close to nature, and eliminated motel rooms and a nightly search for clean rooms with appropriate furnishings.²⁶

The Volkswagen campers were perfectly suited to this wave of travel, as Seume and Steinke explain:

[After the war] a new spirit of adventure made caravanning a popular pastime, but not everyone owned a car capable of towing a caravan and few had the space or funds to make ownership of a separate car and caravan a viable proposition. The answer lay with VW's Transporter, a vehicle small enough to be driven to and from work every day yet large enough to be converted into a motorized caravan for all the family to enjoy. Virtually square and with not an inch of wasted space, it was the perfect shape for conversion.²⁷

The Transporter was successful in part because it was oriented toward the nuclear family as an autonomous unit. In contrast to the vacationing patterns of previous generations, which had been more focused on community spaces (in the form of railroads, resort hotels, and campgrounds,

²⁶ White, 83.

²⁷ Seume and Steinke, 78.

for example), after World War II vacationers became more interested in private recreation, on the level of the immediate family. Volkswagen buses allowed families to travel under their own power, to their own destinations, at their own speed, and in privacy.

The rise of family-based leisure travel in the postwar era reflects a wider trend toward the nuclear family as the preeminent social unit, reflecting increasing prosperity but also, in light of the war, disaffection with public life and large-scale socialization. In America, not coincidentally, the postwar years are linked with the spread of television, private automobiles, suburbia, and other manifestations of a shift from public to private life. At the same time, dense urban neighborhoods and their teeming, diverse community life faded in importance at mid-century.

Over the course of the 1950s, Volkswagen advertising in Germany shifted in focus from commercial themes to leisure-based themes, as the Transporter gained a strong foothold in the market for passenger and recreational vehicles. Within a few years of its inception, the Transporter had grown beyond its initially limited definition as a light truck. Just as the stylized, celebratory, and old-fashioned Reuters advertisements of the early fifties gave way to more straightforward and light-hearted ads starting at the

end of that decade, the Transporter matured from a wartime-derived spartan workhorse to a fun-spirited pleasure bus for the middle classes.

As we shall see in the following chapters, however, the respectability and normality of the Volkswagen bus was harder to achieve in America. When it was first imported into this country, in 1955,²⁸ its German origin and unusual design set the Transporter apart from American automobiles, and at first it sold only among a specialty market of unconventional people willing to overlook those quirks. A small but steadily growing fan base appreciated their practical applicability to camping and commercial uses.

²⁸ Smaller numbers of Volkswagens, particularly Beetles, had entered the United States prior to 1955, most often brought back by servicemen who were introduced to them immediately after World War Two.

Chapter Two: Coming to America

The Volkswagen corporation began selling their cars in the United States soon after World War II, but initially met with little success. Heinz Nordhoff, Volkswagen's ambitious and visionary president, recognized the commercial potential of the American car market, the largest in the world, and sought to tap into it. In 1949, a year after assuming control of the Wolfsburg factory, Nordhoff sent Ben Pon, the successful Dutch exporter and originator of the Transporter, to sell a Beetle in America. After a round of unflattering publicity in New York City, where reporters panned the Beetle as "Hitler's car," and unsuccessful attempts thereafter to entice foreign-car importers with it, Pon sold the car to cover his mounting hotel bill and reported back to Nordhoff a failure.²⁹ Later that year, the chairman himself traveled to America to entice potential distributors, but again could not convince American dealers of the car's marketability.

America initially rejected the Volkswagen Beetle because of its unconventional design and the stigma of its German origin. In 1949, only four years after the war, patriotic anti-German sentiment was running high. At the same time, American consumers and carmakers were oriented toward

²⁹ Nelson, 169.

much larger, more ostentatious automobiles. Frank Rowsome, writing in *Think Small: The Story of those Volkswagen Ads*, describes American cars of the 1950s as “lovely sponge-cake automobiles frosted with chrome and plastic.”³⁰ By American standards, the Volkswagen seemed plain, weak, and small; the Beetle’s old-fashioned, thrifty design too clearly betrayed its roots in 1930s Germany. Americans were looking into the future, toward an era of optimism and plenty, and their large cars reflected that mood.

Nevertheless, though very slowly at first, Volkswagen did build a customer base in America. Max Hoffman, a New York-based auto importer, sold 330 Beetles in 1950, distributed throughout the country to foreign-car dealers. Granted, these dealers generally bought the VWs only reluctantly, as a favor to Hoffman, so that he would send them the scarce but popular Jaguars and Porsches he also distributed. Over time, however, Volkswagen’s popularity grew through word of mouth, and the cars began to outsell Hoffman’s other foreign brands. Among other factors, Volkswagen’s prices gave customers excellent reason to buy; in 1959, the Beetle sold for almost a thousand dollars less than the cheapest American car on the market.³¹ These practical advantages clearly account for

³⁰ Rowsome, 44.

³¹ Robert Glatzer, *The New Advertising: The Great Campaigns from Avis to Volkswagen* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1970), 30.

Volkswagen's eventually substantial impact on the American car market. A mid-sixties Beetle advertisement summed up the practical advantages of the car, each point implicitly contrasted with American designs: "The VW came along and offered a sensible size, low price, high gas mileage, utter reliability, careful workmanship and a shape that was always in style."³² Volkswagen presented a new paradigm in car design, one at first ostracized but eventually imitated.

The exact consumer profile of early Volkswagen consumers is difficult to pinpoint because statistical and anecdotal evidence is scarce. In an introductory essay to *Is the Bug Dead? The Great Beetle Ad Campaign*, the author proposes that "by the early 1950s, the Beetle had become very attractive to the growing number of U.S. drivers who were sick of the big-car diet dished up by Detroit: vast, thirsty machines that sprouted annual changes for obsolescence's sake."³³ Following a policy of planned obsolescence that had characterized the American automobile industry since the 1920s, the automakers pursued high profit margins at the expense of their reputations by intentionally designing their cars to be replaced within a few years of purchase. Whether early consumers were drawn to the Beetle

³² Reprinted in Marya Dalrymple, ed., *Is the Bug Dead?* (New York: Stewart, Tabori, and Chang, 1982), 49.

³³ Dalrymple, 7.

primarily in reaction to the shortcomings of American cars or in affirmation of the Beetle's positive attributes is difficult to know.

Many people categorized Volkswagen owners according to an inferred personality profile. Gordon Buford, the man who created Herbie the Love Bug, the sentient Beetle of Disney fame,³⁴ suggests that in the fifties, people willing to ignore the car's stigmatizing characteristics were considered iconoclastic. He writes:

Volkswagens up to that time were owned by a type of person that was considered eccentric at best, suspected of all kinds of dark thinking at worst. In the age of tail fins, the Volkswagen just couldn't be for real. The car was the very antithesis of American products and American tastes. It was okay for a joke... but not for an honest-to-goodness car.³⁵

How many Volkswagen owners lived up to this mixed reputation is difficult to tell. I will wager that Volkswagen's consumer profile was the same in the fifties as that which later solidified and has since persisted throughout Volkswagen's fifty-year history in America. That is, Volkswagen's first customers were pragmatists who were willing to look past its oddness to appreciate its economy and durability. They may have reveled in their uniqueness, or simply may have been indifferent to public sentiment. Either way, the attitude of these consumers suggests that the late-sixties American

³⁴ Buford wrote a book entitled *The Love Bug*, published in 1969 (New York: Scholastic Books), which subsequently became the first in a series of Disney films on Herbie.

³⁵ Gordon Buford, "Where do Herbies Come From?" *Small World*, Spring 1970, p.9.

counterculture, with its valuation of nonconformity and of alternatives to mainstream consumerism, had broader roots in this country than academics typically argue.³⁶ The following chapter explores Volkswagen owners' progressivism in greater detail.

Heinz Nordhoff's approach to selling Volkswagens in America explains how the brand developed such a positive reputation as a dependable and sensible vehicle. In 1953, deciding that Max Hoffman's distribution network was unambitious in scope and irregular in structure, Nordhoff canceled Hoffman's contract and replaced his supply chain with a highly organized and well-supported infrastructure of exclusively Volkswagen-based dealerships and service centers. This network brought the United States in line with Volkswagen's worldwide distribution strategy, which emphasized brand autonomy, quality, and uniformity within

³⁶ For example, Jay Stevens, author of *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), describes the hippie counterculture as the natural outgrowth of the psychedelic culture that predated it. His history is intellectual rather than social, and he makes no mention of consumerism or other broad-based elements of popular life that may have contributed to the hippies' lifestyle. Instead, he focuses on the elites who predated them, including Beats such as Allen Ginsberg and psychedelic pioneers such as Timothy Leary. He views hippie ideology as directly inspired by these predecessors, if unconsciously so: "When a hippie claimed that 'I'm from another race, not black, not white, maybe I'm of a race that's not here yet, a race without a name,' what you heard were echoes of Huxley's evolutionary romanticism.... When they talked about life being a series of games and the individual a collection of masks, defenses, and often self-deceptive strategies, the intelligent cross-observer referenced the statement with Leary's transactional psychology; while a descriptive like 'hard kicks' was unquestionably a daredevil child of Kesey's can-you-pass-the-acid test perspective" (303).

the dealer network. Nordhoff gave the Volkswagen dealerships standardized layouts and employee training, and he ensured that dealers were well stocked with parts and skilled mechanics.

Nordhoff's emphasis on standardization worked to avoid the pitfalls of other brands of imported cars. Too many foreign manufacturers neglected to provide adequate parts inventories and repair services to keep their vehicles running, which undermined the long-term practicality of owning those cars. Indeed, a lack of adequate service facilities also plagued American auto manufacturers, who expected consumers to replace their cars regularly rather than maintain them for long periods. Focusing heavily on sales resulted in a decline in the quality of American cars.³⁷ Also, by insisting that dealers handle VWs exclusively, Nordhoff "gave them pride in their product and forced them to care about satisfying the customer," as Robert Glatzer suggests in *The New Advertising*.³⁸

Nordhoff made sure, too, that his American lieutenants were loyal to Volkswagen's corporate philosophy and enthusiastic about the cars. Will van de Kamp, for example, the East Coast distributor in the 1950s, is described in *Small Wonder: The Amazing Story of the Volkswagen* as "an

³⁷ Nelson, 198.

³⁸ Glatzer, 30.

evangelist, possessed of a near-fanatic missionary zeal.... He never doubted that Volkswagen would become a tremendous success in the United States.”³⁹ Van de Kamp incessantly toured the American Volkswagen dealerships, enforcing high and rigid standards for the presentation of dealerships and their salesmen. According to Nelson, van de Kamp’s faith in Volkswagen and his optimistic, energetic vision characterized every major figure in the company’s history, from Porsche and Nordhoff to smaller figures. This enthusiasm for Volkswagen cars and the principles upon which they were built – quality, economy, durability – trickled down to their devoted consumer base. In other words, the cult-like devotion to the Volkswagen bus in later years possesses deep roots within the corporation itself.

The dependable quality of Volkswagen’s vehicles and of the infrastructure that supported them paid off during the 1950s. In 1959, Americans registered over 150,000 Volkswagens – 120,000 Beetles and 30,000 Transporters – representing an astronomical increase for one decade of growth, from the two cars sold in 1949 and 25,000 sold in 1955.⁴⁰ By

³⁹ Nelson, 178.

⁴⁰ Alessandro Falassi and Gail Kligman, “Folk-Wagen: Folklore and the Volkswagen Ads,” *New York Folklore*. 1976, v.2: 85.

1961, Volkswagen had become the third-largest auto producer worldwide, then trailing only General Motors and Ford in volume.⁴¹

However, only with the appointment of a new head of Volkswagen of America, Carl Hahn, who took over from van de Kamp in 1958, did Volkswagen's sales truly take off. Hahn, unlike his predecessor, recognized the potential of mass advertising to enhance the visibility and reputation of consumer products. Van de Kamp had authorized only a small number of ads, and in small circulation, leaving a legacy of rather unremarkable promotions. Hahn, on the other hand, decided in 1959 to invest in a national advertising campaign even though Volkswagen was then backlogged with six months of customer orders in this country. Hahn knew that an upcoming factory expansion in Germany would reduce the backlog, and he felt that "the farther limits of word-of-mouth advertising were perhaps being explored." In the long run, he concluded, "To expand the VW share of the market in big-league market sales, national advertising would be needed." Hahn felt that informative advertising would complement the existing word-of-mouth dialogue about Volkswagens by affirming and enhancing customers' knowledge and appreciation of their cars' quality.⁴²

⁴¹ Nelson, 202; Bobbit, 39.

⁴² Rowsome, 59.

Hahn was correct in his investment. The Volkswagen advertising campaign of the sixties paid off enormously in enhancing the national visibility of their automobiles.

Hahn and his staff took three months during the summer of 1959 to decide on the best American advertising agency to represent their vehicles. Most of the prospective ideas presented by agencies were discouraging. Hahn felt the ads were generic and insincere, and lacked any real knowledge of the products in question. Volkswagen's search narrowed to five potential agencies "who seemed to relate to reality" in capturing the advertising the attributes and overall character of their automobiles. Hahn split the account between two agencies, giving advertising for the Transporter to Fuller & Smith & Ross and the Beetle advertising to Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB).⁴³ The former agency was selected for their experience with industrial accounts, applicable to the light-commercial Transporter, and the latter because Hahn was attracted to DDB's emphasis on honesty in their ads. A year later, in November 1960, DDB took over the entire account, having already demonstrated the raw talent that would, over the course of the 1960s, make their firm and Volkswagen famous.

⁴³ Ibid., 60.

By Madison Avenue standards, Doyle Dane Bernbach was a small agency when they contracted with Volkswagen in 1959. Ranked 80th in revenue among agencies nationwide, the firm's three founders had come together a decade earlier, but their agency grew slowly. Nevertheless, the agency had already developed a strong reputation within their industry for idiosyncratic and memorable campaigns, even before the Volkswagen campaign, whose popularity and innovation established DDB's reputation as one of the all-time best advertising agencies. Their earlier El Al campaign, for example, had famously violated an established taboo in airline advertising by showing a vast ocean. (As one executive had counseled, "Never show an ocean because people will be afraid of falling in it.")⁴⁴ Robert Glatzer, author of *The New Advertising*, credits DDB for promoting the creativity- rather than science-based advertising that now dominates the industry, declaring that their work "has been the greatest single influence on advertising in this country since World War II."⁴⁵

Authors analyzing the Volkswagen advertising campaign often focus on the advertising philosophy of William Bernbach, the most outspoken of the three partners. A collection of quotations attributed to

⁴⁴ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁵ Glatzer, 15.

Bernbach, printed as *Bill Bernbach Says...* on the fiftieth anniversary of the firm's creation, illustrates his emphasis upon principles of creativity, sincerity, simplicity, honesty, and personality in his advertising strategy. Bernbach viewed advertising as an art, not a science, a medium dependent on talent and vision rather than statistics or rules. In contrast, conventional American advertising agencies depended on surveys and theories for guidelines on affecting consumers. This scientific approach created rigidity and uniformity in their advertising style, while never guaranteeing a successful campaign. Bernbach told employees "adopt your techniques to an idea, not an idea to your techniques." The founder also memorably exhorted this: "It's that creative spark that I'm so jealous of for our agency and that I'm so desperately fearful of losing. I don't want academicians. I don't want scientists. I don't want people who do right things. *I want people who do inspiring things.*"⁴⁶

Bernbach made a point of giving employees artistic license in creating ads, in contrast to the industry standard. Conventional advertising agencies relied on committees, making them victim to "Group-Think," in the words of Frank Rowsome, and resulting in less daring and less distinctive ads. Thomas Frank, writing in *The Conquest of Cool*, suggests

⁴⁶ *Bill Bernbach Says...*, [n.p., n.d.]. Emphasis in original.

that Bernbach's innovative approach to advertising was even countercultural. He writes, "Bill Bernbach was an enemy of technocracy" in his aversion to a regimented system of producing advertisements, "long before the counterculture raised its own voice in protest of conformity and the Organization Man." Frank quotes Bernbach railing against a methodical and scientific approach to advertising; instead, he advocated broad creative license for his employees.⁴⁷

Volkswagen's campaign certainly succeeded in inspiring the American public. DDB's Volkswagen ads were "an immediate crazy success," says Rowsome,⁴⁸ and during the 1960s, the Volkswagen ads achieved a highly visible place within American popular culture. In a clear reflection of the campaign's impact upon public consciousness, the ads spawned a wave of cartoons that played upon the humorousness of the Beetle, using images and themes taken directly from the ads. In the late sixties, three collections of these cartoons were published, and Volkswagen cartoons were also published intermittently in Volkswagen of America's free owners' magazine, *Small World*, distributed by the corporation to customers from 1963 through the 1980s. A Beetle advertisement from

⁴⁷ Frank, 56.

⁴⁸ Rowsome, 67.

1960, showing the car with a wind-up knob on its rear hatch (a self-depreciating reference to its toy-like smallness), returned to life seven years later in two cartoons by Virgil Partch. Other cartoons from the late sixties played upon general themes expressed in the ads: the air-tight seals on Volkswagen cars (in the cartoon, a man pops through the roof after a doorman shuts his door), their air-cooled engines' ability to drive without water (a Beetle gives a camel an inferiority complex), and their age-old design (a Beetle is uncovered in an archaeological dig).⁴⁹

The Volkswagen ads' popularity also spawned college term papers, cocktail-party conversations, and personal collections gathered from magazines. Sidney Marshall, writing in *Small World* in fall 1966, describes a collection of Volkswagen ads that cover her daughter's bedroom walls.⁵⁰ In the same issue, a woman describes a painting she created of her Beetle, based on an ad from several years before.⁵¹ In other editions of the magazine, readers refer to the advertisements in letters to the editor, sometimes comparing their families to the families portrayed in the ads. Marshall, in the same article as above, comments extensively on various

⁴⁹ See Charles Addams et. al, *Think Small* (N.p., 1967), a book of cartoons and humorous anecdotes about the Volkswagen Beetle, and distributed free to owners courtesy of local Volkswagen dealers. Also see Virgil Partch's untitled, undated collection of cartoons, and Charles Preston's *The Jokeswagen Book* (New York: Random House, 1966).

⁵⁰ Sidney Marshall, "Tales of a Bus Driver," *Small World*, Fall 1996, p.16.

⁵¹ *Small World*, Fall 1966, p.2.

advertisements. She makes two references to a particular 1964 advertisement, and compares herself to another recent ad: “There is only one VW ad I’ve objected to... the one that said, ‘If you can sell your wife on this you can sell her on anything.’ I hung that one in my kitchen [because] my husband had no problem selling me on a Volkswagen.” Earlier she critiqued the DDB campaign, saying of the ads, “Oh, they’re honest, all right; but they’re not true. I mean, why use pictures of synthetic studio families with clean faces, Arden hair-dos, and unused VWs? Why not use real Volks?”⁵² These examples indicate that at least Volkswagen owners, if not the public at large, were aware of the ads and in dialogue with them.

The corporation directly encouraged public awareness of their ads, and the depreciating but ultimately affirming message behind them, through promotional campaigns. I asked Bob Thurmond, a local Austin resident who purchased a VW bus with his wife in 1965, how aware he was of Volkswagen’s marketing. He stated that “I was quite aware of it, because I related to it, I had something that they were talking about.” He informed me that the corporation reiterated the theme of its advertising campaign with promotional items. Imitating the bus-as-box theme of one memorable

⁵² Ibid., p.16.

ad, the dealer gave their family a toy box, “painted to look like a bus, with wheels,” when they purchased their bus. The promotional item became a part of his household: “The kids loved it. They used it for years, till it fell apart. It was sitting inside. They used it as a play box, to store their toys.”⁵³ We see how Volkswagen’s multifaceted advertising entered into the private realm of everyday popular culture.

In contrast to the advertising campaigns for other automobile makers, DDB’s Volkswagen ads were bluntly honest in both appearance and content. Standard automobile advertising of the 1960s called for glossy, full-color ads that accentuated the perceived social status or sex appeal of the model and brand in question. To convey the flashy and sexy image the corporations desired for their cars, advertisements evoked luxury, comfort, and status. Alessandro Falassi and Gail Kligman, in an article entitled “Folk-Wagen: Folklore and the Volkswagen Ads,” explain that “The trend in automobile ads has been to stress styling, appearance and power in addition to the promise of heightened social status.”⁵⁴ The showy appearance and fluffy content of the ads, with correspondingly impressive but shallow text, cloaked the cars in insincere and generic glamour. The

⁵³ Interview with Bob and Lynn Thurmond. Austin, Texas, September 25, 2001.

⁵⁴ Falassi and Kligman, 79.

cars in question were invariably complimented by the presence of attractive models that graced the cars' hoods. For example, a 1967 Plymouth advertisement evoked status and prestige with an Ivy League crew team next to the car, hovering around a beautiful and unavailable Jackie Kennedy look-alike.⁵⁵

The cars in question, the standard American models of this era, epitomized an emphasis on form over function, with showy status-grabbing designs and low durability. The Plymouth campaign brags of the exaggerated dimensions of the car (“a family room on wheels”) and the aspirations of luxury status: “the furnishings are straight from a banker’s penthouse.” Another ad, also from 1967, directly equates bulk with status: “Can you imagine a beautiful new car that’s longer, wider, heavier – bigger than its competition? We did. Plymouth Belvedere.”⁵⁶

Volkswagen adopted the opposite approach in both car design and advertising, using quirky and generally subtle advertising to market its relatively small and basic vehicles. The characteristically simple layouts of the 1960s ads deliberately opposed many conventions of automobile advertising of that era, in both aesthetics and attitude, to accentuate the

⁵⁵ Plymouth, 1967.

⁵⁶ Ibid. See also Frank, ch.3, for a contrast of 1960s Volkswagen ads with American ones.

distinctiveness of their product. The Volkswagen ads, particularly in the early sixties, were characteristically stark in appearance in comparison to the industry standard. The cars were often photographed on a plain white background, and the accompanying text was generally brief and informal in tone. Perhaps the most famous Volkswagen advertisement of the campaign, and one of the first, epitomizes this austere approach. The ad shows a diminutive Beetle in the top left corner of the page, dwarfed by white, with the simple byline “Think Small” and some text at the bottom of the page. The majority of DDB Volkswagen ads were photographed on plain backgrounds, simplifying the shot while drawing greater attention to the vehicle.

The text of Volkswagen advertisements was similarly straightforward. The wording was almost entirely devoid of adjectives, contrasting markedly with the insincerely grandiloquent tone of many American car ads. DDB’s Volkswagen ads were unfailingly frank, beginning with self-deprecating comments about the cars’ limitations before shifting to emphasize their superior qualities. DDB adopted this truthful approach to Volkswagen’s cars because the agency recognized the eccentricity of the bus and bug within the American market. By confronting the American public’s resistance to the cars head-on, the

campaign turned Volkswagen's potential liabilities into virtues. Thus the Volkswagens became loveable underdogs: in their ads, the bus becomes "a box" and the bug "ugly." Overall, the joking worked to Volkswagen's advantage by endearing the public to their quirkiness. As Homer Hathaway describes in an article on the humorousness of Volkswagens, "Over the years the VW has become the subject and butt of many jokes and anecdotes. The quips are almost part of our country's folklore.... Most, in one way or another, compliment the car as well as tickle the funnybone."⁵⁷

The success of Doyle Dane Bernbach's Volkswagen campaign was certainly aided by the distinctiveness of their subject. The notable characteristics of the Volkswagens – their air-cooled rear engines, their fuel economy, their low cost ("\$1.02 a pound," said one ad), and their unchanging design, for example – gave DDB a wealth of selling points to accentuate. The Volkswagen advertisements generally highlighted such practical advantages – "You get the headroom of the bus. And 23 windows to look out of" – while also emphasizing the quirkiness of the vehicles and the corporation. "Breaking traditions is a kind of thing with us," says a 1962 bus ad.

⁵⁷ Homer Hathaway, "VW and the Funnybone," *Small World*, Spring 1965, p.11. See Falassi and Klingman for further discussion of the folkloric qualities of Volkswagen's advertising.

By emphasizing the cars' simultaneous oddness and practicality, the net result of Volkswagen's campaign was to indirectly spur the countercultural image that attached to their vehicles during the sixties. Beginning in the fifties, consumers who were inspired to purchase Volkswagens reflected the progressive values that Volkswagen represented in its cars and ads: sensibleness, humility, and an aversion to status-grabbing materialism. Volkswagen's ads and cars attracted a liberal clientele long before the hippies, as the following chapter makes clear.

Some Volkswagen ads directly encouraged liberal values. One 1960s advertisement abbreviated the youth-culture ethic "Do your own thing" to the tagline "You do yours," appropriating but also engaging the permissiveness and individualism of that mantra.⁵⁸ Another ad, showing a suburban street filled with Volkswagen buses, promotes the Volkswagen bus as an antidote to American postwar conformity and the banality of suburban life:

If the world looked like this, and you wanted to buy a car which sticks out a little, you probably wouldn't buy a Volkswagen station wagon. But in case you hadn't noticed, the world doesn't look like this. So if you've wanted to buy a car which sticks out a little, you know just what to do.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Of course, as Falassi and Klingman explain (83), Volkswagen adopted many common aphorisms from popular culture, so using "Do your own thing" is not unusual or necessarily very political.

⁵⁹ See www.vangon.com.

Ads such as this, which simultaneously critiqued contemporary society while celebrating the bus, intellectually prefigure the hyper-individualism which characterized the sixties counterculture and further attest to the forward-thinking vision of DDB. The critique of 1950s-style suburban American conformity carried in this ad entered popular discourse only in the mid-sixties, when this ad was published. The advertisement thus demonstrates a surprising degree of progressive social consciousness for addressing such delicate and new cultural issues.

Many early Volkswagen bus advertisements confronted the apparent unpopularity of the bus among women, as well, and in effect promoted the bus as a feminist vehicle. The text of one ad suggests that hip, intelligent, and independent women like the bus, or should:

Do you have the right kind of wife for it? Can your wife bake her own bread? Can she get a kid's leg stitched and not call you at the office until it's over? Find something to talk about when the TV set goes on the blink? Does she worry about the bomb? Make your neighbors' children wish that she were their mother? Will she say yes to a camping trip after 50 straight weeks of cooking? Let your daughter keep a pet snake? ... Let you give up your job with a smile? And mean it? Congratulations.

Of course, the advertisement is nonetheless directed at the husband, talking *about* the wife, because while the wife may be hip, the husband still heads

the household (he's at the office while she's baking bread) and thus he earns the family income required to purchase the vehicle.

Lest we think Volkswagen corporate culture was, for whatever reason, uncommonly progressive on the subject of gender equality, certain articles published in the company's *Small World* magazine quickly disavow that idea. In one story from the fall 1967 issue, a husband writing about his family's round-the-world trip in a Volkswagen bus describes how his "darling, idiotic wife" spent too much money on paint, and how he abused her for her error. He recounts the displeasure he expressed toward his wife: "You idiot!" I yelled at her when I learned how much she paid for the paint. "I could have painted the entire thing for a dollar." She replies meekly and begins to cry. In another *Small World* article, from spring 1968, albeit humorous and fictional, a man complains to a friend about his wife's behavior on a family road trip. He writes, "Mabel said she was tired. I don't understand her sometimes. I take her on a nice vacation and after a few days she starts complaining!" The fictional husband refuses to let the wife drive after she stops the car to sightsee, and then chooses to drive marathon shifts to get home faster, in a stereotypical show of macho

endurance.⁶⁰ Though the articles are written with humorous intent, they remind us that Volkswagen owners were not immune to the social norms of American society.

One wonders whether the progressive values evident in the 1960s Volkswagen advertising campaign genuinely reflect the value system of DDB and Volkswagen of America. Cynics would suggest that, given the profit-driven imperative of business enterprise, the agency and corporation should more realistically be described as value-neutral marketing geniuses. DDB's ads were successful enough to worm their way into popular consciousness, evidenced by the multiple cartoon books playing off their themes, and the campaign helped Volkswagen establish a very positive brand image, which in turn helped them sell millions of cars. The ads' genius lies in their ability to tap into the collective American subconscious and address poignant issues such as individuality and gender, and do so in a friendly and humorous way that softened the capitalist imperative behind the ads. Also, because the ads' text was written in a casually conversational tone, the process of influencing consumer behavior was humanized and made benevolent.

⁶⁰ Russ Jenkins, "Hey, Charlie!," *Small World*, Spring 1965, p.14.

In the ultimate coup for advertisers and corporation, the public believed Volkswagen's message and enjoyed it. We may ask, was their audience naïve for accepting and internalizing the corporation's advertising so voluntarily and whole-heartedly? Certainly the American public was less sophisticated and less cynical toward commercial advertising in the 1960s because both the industry and public were less savvy about marketing and brand image. Overall, the self-consciously hip image adopted by DDB for Volkswagen, whether entirely sincere or not, foreshadows the trend in contemporary advertising toward co-opting the ethics and aesthetics of youth culture and counterculture, in particular. Thomas Frank, among others, has examined the exploitation of counterculture by corporations for the sake of brand image and profit. *The Conquest of Cool* and *Commodify Your Dissent*, the latter book edited with Matt Weiland, address this trend.

In the next chapter I describe the ownership and use of buses from their introduction to this country in the mid-fifties to the flowering of hippie-bus culture in the late sixties. I show how, while not as obviously deviant or critical as the hippies and their bus culture, the pre-hippie era of bus owners were countercultural in their own way. In fact, Volkswagen bus owners of the fifties and sixties may be as avant-garde and iconoclastic as their more colorful progeny because their cultural context was more

conservative and because they pioneered the lifestyle that accrued to
Volkswagen buses.

Chapter Three: The Pre-Hippie Bus

The Volkswagen is not a car, it's a disease! And a contagious one at that!

— Owner quoted in “Camping in a Volkswagen,” *Popular Mechanics*, July 1955.

One may well ask, “What is there about Volkswagen owners? Why do they, in particular, paste funny signs on their cars and pull outrageous stunts?” An answer is perhaps implied in the remarks of Dr. Gordon Edson, a British psychologist specializing in consumer behavior. He pointed out that buyers will often adopt a certain mood from the nature of the commodities they purchase. A woman with a new hat and gloves feels sophisticated. A man with a saw or router might feel like a skilled craftsman, while the owner of a [Beetle or bus] may inherit a frisky, uninhibited, and free feeling.

— *Small World*, spring 1965.

By the late sixties, the Volkswagen bus had been adopted by the hippie counterculture of that era, building an iconic link between vehicle and lifestyle that has lasted ever since. In its earlier years, however, the vehicle was used by people with similar attitudes as the hippies and for similar purposes. Important elements of pre-hippie bus culture, such as travel, independence, and community, foreshadowed and helped inspire the later hippie-bus phenomenon. This behavioral and philosophical continuity is important to recognize because it places the hippie-bus culture in context in a longer historical trajectory.

The early history of the bus in this country shows not only the broad roots of the hippie-bus phenomenon, but more broadly hints at the often underappreciated breadth of the background to the counterculture as a whole. As I mentioned previously, intellectual histories of the counterculture tend to identify the Beats as the philosophic and cultural fathers of the hippies, neglecting the much wider and deeper ideological and demographic precedent for that movement.⁶¹ Indeed, viewed within a larger scope, it is possible that the Beats were only one of many influences on the counterculture, the tip of a cultural iceberg that included a more broad-based dissatisfaction with the conservatism and materialism of postwar America. In writing the history of the hippies, of course, historians naturally gravitate to obvious and well-documented phenomena; in this case, the Beats are prominent in history because theirs was an elite literary movement, so understandably their ideas and lives were well documented.⁶²

⁶¹ Echoing the common idea of a direct historical trajectory from Beats to hippies, Jay Stevens describes the hippies as “second-generation Beats” (299).

⁶² I mistrust such historiography because it relies too much on those obvious sources, begging the question of whether those sources were truly important or merely prominent. As a populist-inclined historian, I mistrust any histories that seem too clearly to reflect a bias toward the famous or powerful, including this example with the Beats of tracing the history of a mass movement affecting millions of people, the hippie counterculture, to the writings of a handful of people. That said, Jeffrey Meikle informed me that “*Masses* of middle-class kids” read the Beats; among his own friends, in high school in the mid-sixties, Kerouac and Ginsberg were particularly powerful in inspiring them to “look for trouble as soon as we got to college” (personal communication).

The liberal, adventurous, well-educated people who bought Volkswagen buses in the fifties and sixties shared many traits with the hippies. Hippies attracted and continue to attract attention because of their flamboyance, but their lifestyle and attitudes were by no means original. Like the hippies that followed them, many owners in the fifties and early sixties used the buses for traveling and lived in them along the way. Also like the hippies, the bus greatly enhanced owners' mobility, providing leisure, an intimate community, and educational experiences in the process.

Demographically, much continuity existed between early bus owners and the countercultural owners who came later, as both groups were largely composed of college-educated, middle-class white liberals. The principal difference therein lay in the fact that earlier owners were typically families or couples, and therefore both older and more socially established than the younger single men who became attracted to the bus in droves beginning in the later sixties. Families have continued to comprise the majority of bus owners, mostly because that demographic group is larger and possesses greater buying power, but the younger and wilder owners have clearly monopolized the bus's public image. The fifteen-year pre-hippie era of the bus laid the groundwork for the countercultural adoption

by establishing a cultural precedent and, on a more practical level, by accumulating a stock of second-hand buses to be passed on.

* * *

Though the Volkswagen corporation began importing the bus into the United States in the early fifties, the volume of buses sold remained low throughout that decade while Volkswagen built up its distribution network and its reputation, though the number grew steadily during that period. By 1956, *Road and Track* magazine was impelled to comment that “the popularity of Volkswagen’s compact, utilitarian [Transporters] has risen in this country to a point where we felt an accurate record of their performance abilities would make an interesting report.”⁶³ Unfortunately, information about early owners is difficult to pinpoint because customer profiles are scarce from this era.

Drawing from two road tests published in 1956 and Volkswagen’s own brochures from the fifties, I gather that in the early years Volkswagen buses were bought primarily by families for the purpose of camping. Although the Volkswagen was unconventional in appearance and foreign in origin, sources suggest that its owners lived well within the bounds of

⁶³ *Road and Track*, December 1956.

middle-class respectability.⁶⁴ Brochures and articles reflect the propriety of Volkswagen-owning families as well as their leisure orientation. Staged photographs in promotional materials without exception show prosperous-looking Caucasian families using camper buses on vacation, at the beach or in the woods. In a 1960 brochure, for example, a well-dressed, happy-looking family enjoys a vacation by a pleasant stream. The father and son fish while the mother serves her daughter lunch in front of an immaculately clean bus interior. In this case and elsewhere, the bus seems an extension of their own upright citizenship, serving as a vehicle (literally) allowing them well-deserved and wholesome outdoor recreation. Road tests for the Volkswagen bus also corroborate through photographs this demographic profile of middle-class white families.⁶⁵

Whether deliberate or not, the 1950s advertising for the bus replicated the traditional gender roles of that era, helping to ensure that the odd-looking German bus fit within the bounds of American cultural norms. In one photo, a man reclines in a lawn chair next to the van, reading, while his wife serves him coffee; in another, a father and daughter eat breakfast at

⁶⁴ Because Volkswagen is motivated by commercial interests, their representation of owners in brochures and advertisements is somewhat suspect, of course, as they may have overexaggerated the status of the model customers in their brochures. The families portrayed there may actually look wealthier than the average Volkswagen owners.

⁶⁵ See *Motor Trend*, October 1956, and *Road and Track*, December 1956.

the table inside while the wife cooks. Elsewhere, a mother and father sit in front of a bus while approvingly watching their sons play “cowboys and Indians” along a riverbank, while a teenage couple ventures off to swim. Needless to say, this early advertising contrasts greatly with the quixotic Doyle Dane Bernbach advertising campaign of the following decade. By the sixties, Volkswagen had become established enough in this country to risk a more distinctive and daring public image, but for the fifties Volkswagen’s goal was normalization.

The 1950s Volkswagen camper advertisements suggest that the camper has allowed these families to carry not only their home but also their civility along with them on the road. The bus is an extension of their homes, and indeed their clothing and posture seem lifted directly from a picture-perfect middle-class living room. We see families snuggling into a comfortable-looking bed inside the bus, eating dinner at the inside table, and otherwise replicating typical behaviors of everyday home life. In practice, too, the Volkswagen bus helped middle-class families strike a balance between the tedious comforts of home and the unsettling adventures of traveling, giving them mobility without sacrificing their security. The bus’s advertising promoted this idea of the bus as the best of both worlds. As a 1960 brochure states, “You have a yen to travel to off-beat places, but

aren't sure of the accommodations? You'd love an outdoor holiday, but want your comfort, too? Want to roam, but like a homey feeling? The Volkswagen camper is for you!"⁶⁶ The bus represented an appealing compromise for its owners, given the conservative cultural climate of the fifties and early sixties, allowing some liberation from home life without sacrificing respectability or security.

The Volkswagen camper was popular among adventurous families and couples because it addressed an underdeveloped market for small, affordable, mass-produced camping vehicles. Americans used cars for traveling and camping throughout the twentieth century, but prior to the Volkswagen bus most campers were modified at home from regular passenger vehicles, trucks, or buses. The factory-made Volkswagen camper eliminated the need to modify one's own vehicle for camping, providing convenience and prestige. The novelty and appeal of this camper is evident in the impressed tone of the 1956 *Motor Trend* reviewer, particularly in his detailed description of the camper's convenient and novel camping accessories. The author marvels at the "deceptively simple" cooking and

⁶⁶ Volkswagen of America, 1960.

sleeping arrangements and discusses step-by-step the evening process of converting the bus from passenger vehicle to sleeper.⁶⁷

The bus's singular place in the fifties- and sixties-era camper market helps explain its popularity. More broadly, though, as the hippie travelers proved abundantly in decades to come, the bus tapped deep into Americans' dual love affairs with travel and automobiles. The bus remains such a prominent American icon today because, owing to its strong association with camping and travel, and later because of its link to the similarly symbol-laden hippie counterculture, it came to symbolize the classic American idea of freedom (in some contexts). Over time the Volkswagen's German origin paled in comparison with the all-American ideological tones it evoked.

The character and personality ascribed to the Volkswagen bus early on also foreshadow the countercultural reputation of the bus. Interestingly, the American public attributed a charisma to the bus long before it developed its full-fledged image as a hippie bus. Even in the fifties the bus seemed to transcend its purely vehicular nature, evidenced by the common habit of naming one's bus, in the same spirit that led later owners to paint

⁶⁷ British magazines wrote similar articles during the fifties that described the camper bus in great and wondrous detail. See, for example, "The VW Devon Caravette," *Motor* magazine, November 19, 1958; and "Microbus in East Anglia," *Autocar* magazine, April 29, 1960.

their buses in psychedelic designs.⁶⁸ The inferred traits overlap between eras, distinguished only by degree, as over time the reputation and symbolic overtones of the bus became more ingrained and enriched.

1950s brochures and road tests represent the bus as facilitating a free-spirited and relaxed lifestyle. A reviewer for *Motor Trend* magazine wrote in October 1956, “More a way of life than just another car, the VW bus... can open up new vistas of freedom (or escape) from a humdrum life.” In the commentator’s charitable analysis, the unimpressive driving performance of the bus, such as its lackluster acceleration and braking ability, became assets on the road to a more leisurely pace of life. “Only if you have all the time in the world” for traveling, he wrote, would the bus appeal to potential customers, yet the self-sufficiency of a compact mobile home clearly outweighed its performance shortcomings.⁶⁹

The most remarkable quotations from the road-test articles explicitly foreshadow the hippie-bus lifestyle that developed over a decade later. As quoted above, the *Motor Trend* reviewer stated, “If you don’t want to be dependent on motels, if you like to stop for a day or a week where the trout

⁶⁸ On naming buses, see for example Emily Kimbrough’s novel *Pleasure by the Busload* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1961), where the passengers name their touring bus. This practice is confirmed in two more recent documentary travelogues from families in their buses, Ann Woodin’s *A Circle in the Sun* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971) and Thea van Halsema’s *Safari for 7* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1967).

⁶⁹ “Volkswagen Kamper,” *Motor Trend*, October 1956.

are biting or the view is straight out of a travel folder, look out! This homely vehicle could cause you to quit your job, sell your house, or otherwise lose control.”⁷⁰ The author represents the Volkswagen bus as a metaphor for and means of personal liberation, whose seductive appeal would draw people into that lifestyle. This quotation pinpoints what the bus later came to represent for many young owners, a mobile home for dropouts who had “lost control” and drifted to the social margins. The Volkswagen became a “disease” (“And a contagious one at that!” in the words of an owner quoted in a *Popular Mechanics* article from 1955) because of the temptation it embodied.⁷¹

When the Grateful Dead tour touched down in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1992, journalist Steve Spence asked a local bartender if he planned to attend the concert. His response attests to the riskily seductive appeal of hippie culture to mainstream American youth:

He grinned widely. “I was thinking of going,” he said, “but I’m afraid it might change my life.” A waitress his age heard that, and laughed somewhat uneasily. She understood what he meant; strange ideas still have their allure, and there was always the possibility of moral defection, the temptation to dump tired old values. Who among the nineties kids had not heard stories of the wicked sixties, the cultural revolution, the Age of Aquarius?

⁷⁰ *Motor Trend*, October 1956.

⁷¹ “Camping in a Volkswagen,” *Popular Mechanics*, July 1955.

Spence describes the bartender's hypothetical dropping-out of mainstream America and into hippie culture by invoking the Volkswagen bus: "So while the bartender laughed it off, maybe he considered the vague possibility of being overcome by a strange emotion to drop out, to buy a beat-up VW bus for \$500, to toss in a mattress, a hot plate, and a portable fridge, and to head off after the Grateful Dead." Spence reminds us that many youths had done just that, managing to sustain themselves financially in the process by living cheaply out of their buses and selling goods on tour.⁷²

Part of the mystique attached to the hippie bus and the hippie movement in general was the sinful thrill and danger of "dropping out" of middle-class society, turning one's back on respectable society and embracing non-traditional ideologies and lifestyles. Such disaffection eventually manifested on a mass scale in the late sixties, and Volkswagen buses became an important part of that counterculture because they facilitated a mobile, economical, and nonconformist lifestyle. The only difference between the *Motor Trend* reviewer's foreshadowing and the reality that surfaced a decade later was that the young hippies did not abandon jobs and houses to become bus-driving drifters. Instead, the

⁷² Spence, 86.

youths became vagabond hippies in the transitional period between childhood and settled adulthood, often during college, instead of it, or soon after graduation. For example, Eric Saperston, the director and protagonist of *The Journey* (1999), graduated college just prior to embarking on his five-year road trip, while Angie and Steve, two bus owners interviewed by Steve Spence said that the vagabond bus lifestyle was “a temporary lark” before the “real-life thing” of college.⁷³ Meanwhile, half of my interviewees bought their buses during college. In the fifties and earlier sixties, of course, and for the majority of mainstream owners throughout the bus’s history, the “loss of control” that *Motor Trend* refers to occurred on a more temperate level, in the form of weekend trips to the lake or the beach or summertime journeys out West, rather than full-time bohemian wandering.

Beyond merely the campers, the Transporter’s physical appearance symbolized a middle ground between middle-class respectability and bohemian rejection of that mainstream. Ran Moran, who owns an early-sixties pickup-truck VW, spoke at length on how the bus’s style reflects its social-class implications. In explaining how his truck reflects his own leftist politics, he stated that “the aesthetics of upward mobility are not

⁷³ Ibid., 90.

involved” with the VW bus, in contrast with the more ostentatious American autos of its vintage and currently. “It is manifestly not an elegant mobile,” he says, because of its stark utilitarianism, nor was it intended primarily for visual appeal. Though many aficionados would disagree, Moran claims “there’s a certain objective [plainness] to the bus. You can say, ‘This is not a class act.’” The aesthetics of the bus reflect its dropout culture, says he:

There’s a certain social consciousness involved with the bus, the element of scoff. Scoffing everyone else, the artificial values of the system. Even in the bug, there’s an implicit rejection. Something about that says ‘We don’t care.’ There’s no pretensions. And this is a society that’s big into pretension.⁷⁴

Steve Spence, writing on Deadhead buses in *Car and Driver* magazine, reiterates the contrarian undertone of the bus’s image: “The VW bus, like the Beetle, has been a ‘negative status symbol’ for most of its 42 years – plain as a brick, simple as a lawnmower, slow as glue, cheap to buy, cheap to run, and cheap to fix, it has hauled a lot of people (and surfboards) around in a style that *disdains* style.”⁷⁵

Moran places the rebellion underlying bus culture in perspective, however, reminding us that dissent within the context of consumption is not politically radical, just somewhat alternative. “We’re not talking

⁷⁴ Interview with Ran Moran. Austin, Texas, October 8, 2001.

⁷⁵ Spence, 86.

revolutionary consciousness here, but it's a way of saying we're not interested [in the mainstream], and by the way, we're not too impressed by [it]. So it's not a strong statement, but a little hint."⁷⁶ With the advent of hippie buses, of course, with their extravagant appearance, the cultural statement that underlay buses became more pronounced and confrontational, and the vagabond lifestyle pursued by many owners later on did signify a more radical dropping-out of mainstream America.

An article from *Small World* magazine, published in winter 1968, reiterates the somewhat marginal social-class and political identifications with the Volkswagen bus. The author describes a couple's trip to visit the theatre in New York City. The evening ended embarrassingly when a parking attendant had difficulty locating and delivering their bus – “You didn't tell me you had a truck,” he said “reproachfully.” While the attendant searched for their bus, a growing crowd of “well-dressed people” – “gentlemen from Scarsdale, the ladies from Old Lyme” – waited impatiently. When the author identified their vehicle as a green 1958 Microbus, the reaction among the prosperous crowd was pronounced:

The handsome men and the beautiful women waiting for the big black Cadillac, the champagne Lincoln Continental, the silver Mercedes Benz, stared. They stared with all the warmth one can muster for a booby from the sticks who is making one late for

⁷⁶ Interview with Ran Moran.

maybe a midnight snack with the Robert McNamaras or a private frug lesson from Joe Piro.

By the time the bus arrived, its owners were hyper-conscious of its relatively poor appearance, describing it in rambling prose as “the battered bus with the big red mud-splash on the front because the hole at the end of the lane doesn’t dry up for days but even the mud doesn’t cover the bumper sticker that identifies you as a Democrat.”⁷⁷ In the author’s mind, living in a rural area and voting Democrat reinforced the lower social status of their vehicle.

One further source hints at the cultural and sociological profile of pre-hippie bus owners. In the July 1964 issue of *Playboy* magazine, Dan Greenburg presents a fascinating “Snobs’ Guide to Status Cars,” where he provides humorous personality profiles of normative owners for different vehicles. Greenburg reminds readers in his introduction, “When you buy a car, you also buy an image.” He offers the Volkswagen Microbus as an illustrative vehicle; the foreshadowing of stereotypical hippie traits in his description is striking:

How to Own a VW Microbus: Offer lifts to friends wearing suits, making sure your front seat contains a load of lumber, a bag of cement, oiled saws wrapped in newspapers and a Coleman lantern. Call food ‘grub,’ sleep ‘raw,’ wear blue denim shirts to the opera and have sex in a sleeping bag. Grow a bushy mustache. Get haircuts that don’t look like you went to a barbershop, even if you did. Enjoy all natural body smells, especially your own. Take

⁷⁷ Eugene Murphy, “The Bus and the Solemn-Eyed Man,” *Small World*, Winter 1968, p.11.

things apart and leave them all over the floor. Eat lots of Mexican food. Sculpt. Reshingle the roof. Lay in a new oak floor. Belch. It is all right to take a Microbus to a surplus store or a Peace March [sic]. It is *not* all right to take a Microbus to Bloomingdale's or El Morocco.

Greenberg's description suggests that by 1964 Volkswagen buses were already associated with self-reliant, hardy, politically liberal men. His VW bus owner echoes the bohemian masculinity embodied by Neal Cassady and made famous by Jack Kerouac's *Dharma Bums*.

* * *

Narratives written about Volkswagen buses and the testimonies of bus owners from the pre-hippie era confirm that the Volkswagen bus appealed to adventurous yet practical middle-class people who appreciated the bus both for its sensibleness and its character. Consider Emily Kimbrough's 1961 travelogue *Pleasure By the Busload*, which recounts her adventures with a group of adults traveling around Portugal in a Volkswagen bus. Her group includes a famous musician, a doctor, a writer, and an orchestra conductor. This avant-garde cross-section of travelers reminds us that the bus, like its passengers, was quite cutting-edge, and required some chutzpah to drive in the early years of its popularity.⁷⁸ While their open-minded

⁷⁸ Admittedly, though, their European location, and the European nationality of two passengers, does diminish the novelty of driving a bus, since buses were more common and accepted in Europe.

bohemianism draws Kimbrough's traveling companions into the bus together, their explicit motivation in selecting the bus is practicality. One member of the party insists they use a bus for transport because "she had used one the preceding year in Scotland, and found it a heaven-sent chariot for transporting a number of people." For this particular trip, its size accommodates five adults and their luggage comfortably; for the passengers, the bus's eccentricity is an allowable corollary to its practicality.

The eccentricity of the bus emerges in Kimbrough's frequent reference to its unusual height, its boxiness, and its loveable mechanical quirks. The author is particularly struck by the bus's lack of a hood: "I realized there was nothing but the windshield between me and space and the street far below. This was going to be like riding on a roller coaster."⁷⁹ The eccentricity of the bus for Kimbrough is limited solely to its appearance and performance, not to its cultural reputation, because apparently in 1961 the bus lacked notoriety. Indeed, the bus is rather novel to both passengers and the public, serving as a conversation piece with strangers. While the bus lacks stereotypical associations, the seeds of its rebellious image are clearly evident here in its aesthetic oddity and its adaptability for traveling. The

⁷⁹ Kimbrough, 21.

social network illustrated here, of a tight-knit group of eccentric friends traveling in a bus on a deliberately fun and adventurous trip, seeking personal growth and cultural interaction along the way, also mirrors essential elements of the hippie-bus lifestyle. Of course, in this case the travelers are respectable middle-aged tourists.

Other travelogues involving Volkswagen buses reiterate the association of Volkswagen buses with mobility, freedom, and lightheartedness, even in the early years. From the outset, the bus served as a liminal vehicle for liminal periods in life, and was used by people willing and interested in exploring that liminality. Unfortunately, no other travelogues were written as early as Kimbrough's 1961 *Pleasure by the Busload*. Given that qualification, two later travel books do overlap thematically with *Pleasure by the Busload*, reflecting the same traditional middle-class profile.

Ann Woodin published *In the Circle of the Sun* in 1971, a story of her family's globetrotting adventures in a Volkswagen bus. The family drove from India through the Middle East and across North Africa over the course of a year, camping in the bus along the way, while her husband was on sabbatical from his position as director of a museum. The family focused their travels on desert areas in order to study and enjoy the variety

of landscapes and exotic cultures to be found there. The Woodin family is well educated and prosperous enough to afford a year's journey, and they are motivated by a peculiarly middle-class adventurousness and openness toward new, enriching experiences.

Despite their adventurous personalities, the Woodins' gender roles remind us that their vagabond lifestyle is framed within respectability and normality. The back-cover blurb for *A Circle in the Sun* perfectly captures the family's blend of adventure and convention, of "dropping out" and yet staying traditional:

Journeying as we did, without our backhome possessions and obligations, we returned to the core of living experience: the getting and eating of food, finding a place to sleep, sitting around a fire to talk... things so simple and clear that somehow they clarified and named our relationships. The boys were brothers and sons, I mother and wife, and my husband, the father, became the pivot around which we all moved.

Because of their self-defined status as a traditional nuclear family, and because of lower living standards existent in the early sixties, having a whole family live out of a small vehicle for a year falls within the bounds of normality. From Ann Woodin's account, the family never felt vulnerable, self-conscious, embarrassed, or harassed for traveling in and camping out of their bus, indicating their normality and contrasting with the sense of victimization sometimes felt by hippie owners.

As for their bus, the Woodin family, like Kimbrough and her friends, initially selected the car because of its practicality. Their prospective touring vehicle had to be “big enough to accommodate the six of us, sturdy enough for the country, and common enough to find spare parts should it break down.”⁸⁰ Over time, through intimate association with the bus, the Woodins recognized and began to revel in the personality that their camper exuded. The family named the bus the “Sand Fish” and apparently enjoyed a strong love-hate relationship with it, prompted in large part by its mechanical weaknesses. The bus’s humanization extended to joking references to its consciousness. After complaining of the bus’s harsh ride – “sometimes, while lurching, bucking, tossing, and swaying along, I want to kick it” – Woodin quickly adds, “I say these things guiltily, out of hearing of the Sand Fish.”⁸¹ Once again we see the dual appeal of the bus, with practicality overlaid by personality.

A third travelogue, written in 1967, just as the hippie movement became prominent on a national level, corroborates our sociological and psychological profile of earlier Volkswagen bus owners. Thea B. Van Halsema’s *Safari For 7* follows an American family on vacation in Europe

⁸⁰ Woodin, 6.

⁸¹ Ibid., 85.

in a bus. The husband's profession as a Protestant minister in this case suggests the educated middle-class profile common among bus owners. Like the Woodin family, the Van Halsemas traveled across Europe for their own edification and personal development, with money and motivation to sustain their journey. Like many other travelers, the Van Halsemas bought their bus for practical reasons, because it was large and would save them money otherwise spent on airfare.

The Van Halsema family also named their bus ("the redbus"), though the author actually refers to the bus as such only rarely. That the family ascribes less personality to the bus than other owners indicates that even in 1967, by which time the bus was definitely building a reputation for eccentricity, that reputation was not ingrained and universal enough to significantly influence this family's perception of their own bus. Almost every other reference to the Volkswagen bus, in any media, particularly from the late sixties onward, conveys a sense of the cultural reputation of the bus, so the Van Halsemas' relative indifference is noticeable. Over time, we see a general trajectory of increasing awareness of the Volkswagen's particular mystique, where earlier accounts generally address the bus less often and with less significance.

Though these travelers seem far from the stereotypical hippie dropouts of later bus legend, in effect the Woodin and Van Halsema families are both temporarily “dropping out” – in their more mainstream and middle-aged way – by leaving their jobs and home lives to travel recreationally for an extended period of time, living cheaply and with few personal possessions along the way. *Small World* magazine provides innumerable other capsule descriptions of middle-class families escaping to exotic locales in their Volkswagen buses. Each quarterly issue of the magazine invariably featured one to three articles submitted by owners that describe their adventures in Volkswagen buses and Beetles. Similar to the book-length travelogues, owners contributing to *Small World* emphasize the adventurous and exotic nature of their travel. One family light-heartedly self-identifies as “vagabonds,” exemplifying the dropout inclinations underlying many of these accounts.⁸²

Travel destinations for the *Small World* globetrotters included Russia, Ethiopia, South America, Britain, Bavaria, Portugal, the Middle East, Mexico, Uganda, Australia, and Ireland, as well as domestic destinations including Maine, Alaska, and even the back streets of Boston.

⁸² Martha Li Von Rosensteel, “On Hotels and Haystacks,” *Small World*, Spring 1967, pp. 8-10.

This large and varied sampling of travel destinations and the overall centrality of travel in *Small World's* content during the sixties reinforce the sense that the Volkswagen bus was specifically designed and used for family travel. After the hippies adopted the bus, of course, it was still associated with travel, as with the practice of following the Grateful Dead on tour around the country. In any case, the orientation toward travel shared by both eras reiterates the vehicle's suitability for such uses, given its relative roominess, durability, and economy.

The Volkswagen corporation and its owners actively invested in the traveling culture associated with their vehicles, as the title and content of *Small World* attest. The magazine's title evokes a sense that Volkswagens, because of their international presence and their versatility, help make the world more accessible, seemingly smaller. The Volkswagen acts as a uniting force for cultural interchange, literally bringing people together. One author implies as much in discussing an overnight stay in a Portuguese fishing village during her family's vacation: "All of the women gathered in the kitchen and laughed and talked while they cooked. My mother and sister helped peel the potatoes, which they could do in any language."⁸³ That Volkswagen makes the world "smaller" conveys a significant

⁸³ Ibid, p.8.

democratic valuation for international community, which in turn reflects the cosmopolitan values of the customers that bought this car. This perhaps naïve sense of international communion through travel, mediated by the bus, shines through in one reader's article about a recently-completed round-the-world trip: "We found that the world is full of the same type of people – people with interests, hopes, and ambitions the same as ours in America. Before the trip, the world had seemed large and foreboding to us, but now that we've been around it and gotten to know its people, we feel that this is truly small."⁸⁴ The wide-eyed tone of this author, which presumably would be enriched and complicated by extended exposure to other cultures, reiterates that many Volkswagen-owning travelers were only taking tentative – or enthusiastic – first steps out of the mainstream.

The idea of "smallness" recurs throughout Volkswagen culture, seen also in the titles of Nelson's *Small Wonder*, Rowsome's *Think Small* advertising history, and Addams' *Think Small* cartoon collection, for example. Volkswagen owners seemed to embrace the "smallness" of their cars: Beetles, in particular, were viewed endearingly for their size, and various articles in *Small World* chronicle the car's heroic carrying capacity. One family took a full supply of camping gear in a bug, complete with

⁸⁴ Gaylon Duke, "The Small World on a Box," *Small World*, Fall 1967, p.21.

stove, table, and refrigerator, and another author describes taking her family of eight on vacation in a Beetle.⁸⁵

While the word refers most explicitly to the diminutive size of the Beetle relative to most contemporaneous American automobiles, “small” hints at a more significant quality of Volkswagen culture. On a philosophic level, the economy and simplicity of Volkswagen’s automobiles represented a reaction to the “bigness” of modern America, with its fast-paced and overconsumptive extravagance. Volkswagens reflected an alternative aesthetic of unassuming functionalism, and owners endorsed that aesthetic by purchasing the cars. This element of Volkswagen culture reflects a wider but underappreciated voluntary-simplicity movement in postwar America, as illustrated by E. F. Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, for example.⁸⁶

More than anything, the content of *Small World* magazine in the 1960s seems to reflect and foster an almost cult-like devotion to the Volkswagen marque. This degree of brand loyalty and consumer acculturation clearly underpinned the hippie-bus culture that developed later. The magazine is filled with enthusiastic and cheerful letters and

⁸⁵ “The Camping Bug,” *Small World*, Spring 1968, p.15; Marjorie Stratton, “That’s Right There’s 8 of Us,” *Small World*, Summer 1966, p.26.

⁸⁶ New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

articles submitted by bus and bug owners, testifying to the endurance or hardiness or spunkiness of their vehicles, and the amusing and enriching experiences that those cars have afforded them.

The great number of reader submissions to the magazine and the in-group chumminess of the entire text convey a sense of healthy, democratic dialogue within the Volkswagen community. Within this VW cult, ownership of the vehicles is the universal leveler, the unifying characteristic that allows owners to relate to one another. At both the nuclear-family level and in the broader Volkswagen family, the cars became a way to bring people together. As far back as 1960, groups of Volkswagen-owning families were gathering together to camp in their buses and enjoy one another's company. One article from *Small World* recalls a group campout in 1963 of the New England Volkswagen Campers Club. Such an owners' club was rare in 1960, when the club was founded, but in coming decades Volkswagen clubs, shows, and conventions became common. This particular club was established by three families on vacation in Acadia National Park, Maine, who were inspired by their mutual interest in bus camping and desired to promote family camping among VW owners. The

author recalls that the owners on that particular trip were enthusiastic, friendly, and diverse in age.⁸⁷

The Volkswagen corporation, motivated both by monetary interests and their own enthusiasm for the corporation, encouraged owners' brand identification by creating image-rich media such as *Small World* magazine and the playfully arrogant Doyle Dane Bernbach advertisements. In the 1960s, the company also authorized Volkswagen histories, funded two promotional cartoon books about Volkswagens, and produced films on corporate activities and history.⁸⁸ Oftentimes their media promotion overlapped, as when the author of the book *Small Wonder*, the seminal Volkswagen history published in 1964, published an article in the spring 1965 issue of *Small World* magazine discussing his book.⁸⁹ Given the degree of enthusiasm conveyed by the corporation toward their automobiles, as evidenced in their ads and *Small World*, one wonders to what degree the corporation shared the alternative social vision creeping into their owners' culture. In the fifties Nordhoff had selected loyal

⁸⁷ Marilyn Esposito, "The Nicest People We Know," *Small World*, Fall 1967, pp.3-4.

⁸⁸ Those films, available on loan from local dealers, included "The Right Hand of Plenty," about automation at the VW factory; "The Four Seasons of Austria," describing a ten-month tour of a Austria; and "Wolfsburg 221," describing the making of a Volkswagen. *Small World*, Fall 1965, p.13.

⁸⁹ Walter Henry Nelson, "I Know Enough About VW to Fill a Book," *Small World*, Spring 1965, pp.3-5.

enthusiasts to lead Volkswagen of America, and that enthusiasm obviously carried on, but I enthusiasm for the vehicles did not necessarily connote liberal values.

The brand loyalty conveyed by Volkswagen owners through *Small World* seems superficially to contradict the popularity of the bus among hippies, given the anticorporate and generally antithetical reputation of that group. Presumably the rejection of mainstream values that the hippies built their reputation on would, in this case, extend to a rejection of mass-marketed durable goods such as vehicles, or at least an avoidance of cult glorification of cars. How to resolve the apparent oddity of hippies buying into this consumer cult? Using a semiotic loophole to resolve the contradiction of glorifying a consumer object within a greater anticonsumerist ethic, hippies from the sixties on have embraced the Volkswagen bus as a sort of “anti-car.” The bus’s economy and underperformance on the road, along with its German otherness and eccentric design, sufficiently distinguish it from other vehicles to except it from the same judgment. For bus owners with strict environmental ethics, for example, the relative fuel economy of the Volkswagen bus alleviates that culpability, as does its association with camping (nature), a slower pace of life, and simplicity.

As revealed by *Small World* magazine, owners express not only affection for the buses but also a great amount of faith in their mechanical reliability. This faith contrasts greatly with the reputation the bus gained in later years as an undependable junker prone to breaking down, epitomized by its place on a list of ten worst cars of all time on National Public Radio's "Car Talk" program.⁹⁰ Such automotive ill repute came about during the seventies as the average age of operating Volkswagen buses increased, and as their mechanical integrity fell over the course of years of dubious repairs by self-made mechanics. In the fifties and sixties, when buses were all newer, before they began filtering through multiple rounds of owners, they performed quite well. Their simple engines were reliable and easy to fix, and their sturdy single-piece light-truck chassis made them durable.

Owners also trusted their buses' rugged durability, as testified by their willingness to take them on long vacations to exotic locales. Owners writing in *Small World* oftentimes described their road-trip adventures as opportunities to test their buses; invariably, the owners were pleasantly surprised by the vehicles' capabilities. In an aptly named article from 1968 entitled "I Love Bad Roads," William Stockdale discusses his family's

⁹⁰ Liane Hansen, "Analysis: Listeners' letters." *Weekend Edition, Sunday (NPR)*, December 10, 2000.

hobby of seeking out bad roads in their bus, delighting in fording streams and conquering mountain ranges. In the process of executing these vacations, his family bonds with one another, the road, and the bus. He writes of one trip to Baja California: “I patted the steering wheel lovingly.... The road is unbelievable. It must be driven to be enjoyed. We battled dust, rocks, ruts, and impossibly steep inclines and descents. It was incredible. Everyone shrieked with joy.”⁹¹

Stockdale’s testimony references the fact that, despite their lack of power and lack of four-wheel-drive, many people over the years have treated Volkswagen buses as off-road vehicles, because of their sturdy frame and high undercarriage clearance. J. Helfrich, responding to Stockdale’s article in a letter to the editor, recommended other “axle busters” where “off-road vehicles or VW buses are required.”⁹² At times the bus becomes downright heroic for this off-road ability, as when a couple saved other vehicles from imminent flooding on a dirt trail in the Utah wilderness.⁹³

In the seventies, this ruggedness manifested itself in the vehicle’s immense popularity among rock-climbing enthusiasts. Nowadays, tellingly,

⁹¹ William Stockdale, “I Love Bad Roads,” *Small World*, Spring 1968, pp.2-5.

⁹² *Small World*, Fall 1968, p.2.

⁹³ David Richter, “Beyond the Belly Wash,” *Small World*, Fall 1968, pp.20-21.

sport-utility vehicles serve the same purpose for the same recreational group.⁹⁴ In the increasingly wealthy and hegemonically consumerist contemporary society we live in, the sport-utility truck better reflects that wealth, along with higher status, respectability, and a faster and more aggressive pace of life. The Volkswagen bus was more appropriate for the seventies and eighties, when the collective gestalt of American society was more relaxed.

Besides reliability and ruggedness, Volkswagen automobiles also attracted owners for their monetary value. Early owners were economically comfortable enough to afford new Volkswagens, but sensitive enough about money to consider their inexpensiveness in their purchases. In an era of postwar prosperity and willful consumerism, where American consumers colluded with automakers to support an industry of flashy, relatively expensive cars, the thriftiness of Volkswagen owners stood out, as the *Small World* article about visiting the New York theatre illustrated. In the late sixties, this frugality became more explicit and extreme with the outright rejection of consumerism that characterized hippies. With this shift from thrifty to anticonsumerist, the bus became more explicitly subversive as a

⁹⁴ Interview with Ian Quigley. Austin, Texas, October 12, 2001.

sociopolitical statement against mass culture and the direction of contemporary American life.

In the 1950s and earlier in the 1960s, Volkswagen bus culture was less vocal about the disaffection from American society potentially embodied and facilitated by the vehicles. However, we clearly see the seeds of the hippie dropout culture in some bus owners' habit of living cheaply and simply through their buses, even if only temporarily on vacation. Some early owners dropped out more permanently, choosing to live in their bus or move to faraway lands with their buses. In a 1966 article from *Small World*, a father describes how he and his wife decided to save up money and move to the Canary Islands, where they refurbished a house and started a family. He describes their life in unwaveringly positive terms, both bragging to and encouraging like-minded readers. He writes,

We've lived here almost two years. We rent a little house with a beautiful garden and a view of a banana plantation, the port of Santa Cruz, and the forever-blue sea. Sue has her housekeeper, Lisa attends a Spanish school, and Julie, now 2-1/2, frolics most of the day in the warm sunshine and basks in the ever warmer affection that all Spanish women lavish on children.⁹⁵

The couple's only reservation before leaving the United States, and what kept them from moving earlier, was a shortage of money. The lower cost of

⁹⁵ Richard Beamish, "We Retired at Thirty," *Small World*, Winter 1966, p.15.

living abroad actually helped them escape the financial burdens of middle-class American life. Their decision to purchase a bus mirrors this same creative resistance to normative standards of consumption.

Another 1966 article from *Small World*, entitled “Save Bucks By the Busload,” reiterates the liberating economics involved in bus living. Here, the family’s love for traveling in their bus encourages them to rethink their attitude toward money. The family searches out free destinations for their vacations, though in the process living cheaply becomes an end in itself. The father writes, “As a traveling family, we operate on two assumptions... there are enough free things to see and do so that every time you pay to see something you are cheating yourself.”⁹⁶ A 1968 article also touches on the theme of cheap vacations in describing a family’s affection for panning for gold in California on vacation, enjoying the outdoors and maybe making a profit in the process.⁹⁷ Another article, from fall 1965, is entitled “The Art of Being a Cheapskate.” It describes the first Volkswagen Club of America Economy Run Run-Off, a 100-mile race for maximum fuel efficiency (won by a Ghia convertible with an average of 65.3 mpg). Once again, the principle of saving money is evident here, an indication of the less-

⁹⁶ William Stockdale, “Save Bucks by the Busload,” *Small World*, Summer 1966, p.18.

⁹⁷ B.G. Murray, “Oh Suzanna!” *Small World*, Summer 1968, pp.18-20.

consumptive lifestyle often advocated by Volkswagen owners.⁹⁸ Thrift has always been an important undercurrent of American life, so the attitudes exhibited by Volkswagen owners toward living cheaply are not too unusual, though the degree of frugality may be.

The do-it-yourself ethic of pre-hippie bus culture, manifested in a tradition of finding inexpensive homemade solutions to practical problems or wants related to one's Volkswagen, reflects the same thrifty willingness to "think outside the box." A handful of articles from *Small World* describe personal modifications to personal buses and Beetles, most often to adapt them for camping. Invariably such articles are accompanied by drawings and photographs that direct fellow owners in how to imitate such modifications. Two men reported on changing ordinary Beetles into campers, one by converting the front seat to beds and the other by replacing the seats with carpeted sleeping platforms.⁹⁹ Several authors described the process of converting ordinary passenger buses to campers, including a remarkable design by an older couple that replaced the back of a bus with

⁹⁸ George Weber, "The Art of Being a Cheapskate," *Small World*, Fall 1965, pp.10-11.

⁹⁹ Rudolph Rakenius, "Bed Bug," *Small World*, Summer 1966, p.22; Vincent Fowler, "Travel Bug," *Small World*, Fall 1966, pp.8-9.

an aluminum-walled camper, finished inside with cedar and mahogany.¹⁰⁰

The same type of modification was performed on a Beetle when a couple built a compact “Little Bugger” motor home on the back of a stock Beetle.¹⁰¹ Another article describes how a man rearranged the rear seats to make a traveling office, while another demonstrates how to create a play platform for children inside the bus.¹⁰²

Beginning in 1968, *Small World* began featuring photographs of hippie-designed buses and Beetles. A photo essay from fall of that year shows half a dozen Beetles with elaborate paint jobs, and the winter 1969 edition of *Small World* featured drawings of hand-painted Beetles on its cover. Inside that issue is an article about the VW bus in *Alice’s Restaurant* (1969), a countercultural movie described in the following chapter.¹⁰³ One 1968 article discusses two independently-minded women who built a log cabin in Oregon, using their bug to drag logs, and another story from that year describes a young bearded librarian in the inner city. Titled “A Groovy Place,” the article recounts how the hippie-like man stages light shows and rock bands at his library and applies drug-culture lingo such as

¹⁰⁰ *Small World*, Spring 1967, p.16. Also Larry Peabody, “Instant Camper,” *Small World*, Spring 1970, pp.10-11; and George Padginton, “Benchbed,” *Small World*, Summer 1967, p.15.

¹⁰¹ Marty and Granville King, “Little Bugger,” *PV4* magazine, August 1975.

¹⁰² *Small World*, Summer 1965, pp.16-17.

¹⁰³ “VW in the Act,” *Winter 1969*, p.7.

“Unlock your mind” to book stickers.¹⁰⁴ Also in 1968, *Small World* showcased a young man who modified his bus by adding carpeting and a pot-bellied stove, complete with brick chimney, for partying and traveling. Another home-modified hippie bus appears in the winter 1979 edition, a self-painted bus with the top half of a Beetle welded on top.¹⁰⁵

These articles indicate how, by 1968, hippie culture had begun to rear its head within the mainstream of Volkswagen culture. In the following chapter I discuss this adoption of Volkswagen buses by the youth counterculture, and the ensuing amplification of the bus’s eccentricity and deepening of the VW cult.

¹⁰⁴ Bonnie Wallace Riggs, “Project Log House,” *Small World*, Summer 1968, pp.2-5; “A Groovy Place,” *Small World*, fall 1968, pp.2-5.

¹⁰⁵ Paul Sawin, “Home is Where the Hearth Is,” *Small World*, Winter 1968, p.10; *Small World*, Spring 1970, p.23.

Chapter Four: The Flowering of Hippie-Bus Culture

You aren't surprised to see peace stickers on Volkswagens. It looks natural, versus sticking out on more respectable cars.

— Ran Moran, Volkswagen bus owner

They were slow. They put you at a slower pace. Like it put you back in another era of driving, like in the fifties, as opposed to the '70s.

— David Woodland, Volkswagen bus owner

In the late 1960s, a cultural revolution among America's youth helped place the United States in turmoil. A minority of college-aged students had been politically active throughout the decade, working on social causes such as civil rights and anti-war protesting, but only in the late sixties did the dissent gain mass acceptance among the youth. Opposition to the war in Vietnam focused the latent antiauthoritarianism festering among the young generation, bringing them together in revolt. The multifaceted political protests of that era reflected a broad sense of dissatisfaction among middle-class white youth. Their alienation from the extant social order, both political and personal, and a resultant search for new paradigms of lifestyle and belief, opened the door to the cultural revolution popularly known as the hippie counterculture.¹⁰⁶ The phrase

¹⁰⁶ The term "hippie" entered mainstream vocabulary in 1967, as its citation in numerous newspaper articles from that year attests (source: *Oxford English Dictionary*). Popular wisdom claims the name is derived from "hipster," as a demeaning spin-off of the earlier term for a bohemian individual.

“sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll” helps describe the countercultural lifestyle, characterized in part by widespread drug consumption and liberalized attitudes toward sexuality, all performed to a rock-music soundtrack courtesy of the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Grateful Dead, and other important bands of the era.

The hippie legacy of the Volkswagen bus, while set in motion by earlier owners and the company’s own 1960s advertising campaign, coalesced with the vehicle’s adoption by the hippie counterculture. The bus rose in prominence along with the spread of the counterculture, attaining iconic status by the time the original hippie movement fully flowered at the Woodstock festival in 1969.¹⁰⁷ In the decades that followed, the hippie reputation of the bus continued to grow, stoked by enthusiasts and the media alike. Young people who “bought into” the Volkswagen bus as a hippie lifestyle accessory helped to deepen that link. The appearance of hippie buses became gradually more pronounced over time, with the incidence of painted, bumper-stickered buses growing as hippie-bus phenomenon became increasingly elaborate and clichéd. Chalo Colina, a former bus owner, describes the culture as self-perpetuating: “The more it

¹⁰⁷ Bob Thurmond testifies that when he and his wife visited the San Francisco Bay Area from Austin in 1969, they saw not just VW buses, but decorated, flower-painted buses specifically. The hippie-bus phenomenon had not yet reached Texas then. Interview with Bob and Lynn Thurmond.

got a reputation for being a bohemian vehicle, the more bohemian-type folks you had riding in them, and using them in that kind of particular way and building that reputation.”¹⁰⁸

Over time, the cultural legacy of the hippie bus has swelled so much that the line differentiating “authentic” hippies and their “real” buses from pop-cultural imitation has become increasingly blurred. For example, in some cases producers rent or purchase hippie-designed buses, with their colorful paint jobs, to use in sixties-themed television episodes or movie scenes. In 1988, for example, a rented or borrowed Volkswagen bus with a rainbow-colored paint job appeared in the TV show *The Wonder Years*. Conversely, many bus owners have been inspired by real-life or media-represented hippie buses to paint their own buses in psychedelic design. One well-known Southern California bus features a very elaborate and colorful paint job with sixties-era slogans such as “Question the government” and “Peace,” along with images of the sun, flowers, peace symbols, and Jimi Hendrix’s head. While some people, including myself, were initially led to imagine the paint job was original to the sixties, the

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Chalo Colina. Austin, Texas, December 12, 2000.

work was actually done within the last several years, commissioned by the bus's foreign owner.¹⁰⁹

Young hippies adopted the Volkswagen bus because it perfectly matched their lifestyle and values. The same criteria that attracted earlier owners appealed to the youth – most importantly, the buses' inexpensiveness, roominess, ease of maintenance, and eccentricity. In speaking with longtime VW bus owners, some of whom purchased buses in the sixties, my interviewees reiterated the buses' practical suitability to the hippie lifestyle. Ran Moran, a middle-aged Austin resident and longtime bus owner, explains that the bus “was cheap, versatile, built for heavy use and traveling, used little gas, and it spoke to the whole idea of getting away.”¹¹⁰ Bob Thurmond explains that

You could live in one. You could easily sleep in one, and live there if you had to. You could party in one, go to the beach in one. It fit the vagabond lifestyle. And the communal living was getting started back in those days. It very much fit in with that lifestyle, because you could pile in all the members of the commune into one vehicle.¹¹¹

While the connection between Volkswagen buses and hippie culture has been exaggerated and typecast over time, particularly in the media, Ran Moran assures me that the link was real: “In the sixties, Volkswagen had a

¹⁰⁹ See Seume and Steinke, p.89.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Ran Moran.

¹¹¹ Interview with Bob and Lynn Thurmond.

place in various countercultural movements. It became a stereotype, but it comes from frequent occurrence. In the sixties there were lots of [hippie buses].”¹¹²

Carla Steinbomer, a current bus owner, explains that Volkswagen buses “were the coolest thing on the road when I was 16 and 17, in ’67 and ’68.” In her view, the buses were popular among young people for practical reasons based on their economy: “They served a purpose of hauling a lot of people, people that were hanging out, dropping out, not working. Part of it was living very cheap, because if you’re traveling around in a van you probably don’t have a job. You could fit more people in it than a car.” For many young bus owners, if not most, the vehicles’ fashionableness was secondary to their practical advantages.¹¹³

While sales of new Volkswagen buses and Beetles remained strong throughout the sixties and seventies, a key characteristic of the emergent hippie-van phenomenon was the second-hand ownership status of these buses. Volkswagen buses had been sold in this country long enough, and in significant numbers, that a considerable stock of used buses had developed by the late sixties. This supply was due in part to the cult of Volkswagen

¹¹² Interview with Ran Moran.

¹¹³ Interview with Carla Steinbomer. Austin, Texas, October 31, 2001

ownership that had been growing earlier in the fifties and sixties, because a growing group of enthusiasts had begun to preserve the vehicles.

Younger buyers purchased used buses chiefly for economic reasons. The advancing age and inexpensiveness of these buses, combined with Volkswagen's preexisting funky reputation and the youths' liberal tendencies, fostered a reckless yet compassionate attitude toward the buses, as we will see. The exuberant paint jobs, extensive interior modifications, and heavy use that many hippie buses endured over the years attest to this unique combination of circumstances. With many Volkswagen buses, as their age and wear increased, and as ownership changed hands repeatedly, their mechanical and structural soundness declined but their charisma continued to grow. The infamously decrepit buses that roamed our nation's highways in recent decades were due, in large part, to the priorities of their owners. Chalo Colina explains:

More than most vehicles, the VW bus appealed to people who may not have been thinking too much about resale value or oil change intervals. They were thinking about the infinite possibilities of where the next day could take them. So you wound up with a lot of cheap, dead buses. You're likely to find buses that have been fairly well decorated but haven't been rust protected, and have big holes in floor pans, or buses that are as comfortable to hang out in as your living room, but burn oil like it's going out of style.

Among a certain subset of bus owners on tour with the Grateful Dead, for example, "there are people who make hemp necklaces and trade tapes and

that's about as technological as they get. Those folks are likely to be driving a dung heap, just driving it till it breaks down." Even still, Colina says, such mechanical problems would not necessarily concern their owners, because they could find ready expertise among fellow travelers in helping to repair their bus.¹¹⁴

Inoperable old buses were often recycled, providing spare parts for higher-functioning buses or being applied to more creative purposes. A Doyle Dane Bernbach ad celebrated such recycling, declaring "Old Volkswagen Station Wagons Never Die" under a photograph of a bus being used as a food stand.¹¹⁵ *Small World* magazine reported on a bus that became a children's playhouse:

In spite of fabled exceptions, old VWs do wear out in time, and our '57 camper did, too. But it did not outlive its usefulness. Instead of going to the graveyard, it went to the backyard. The engine was gone and the transmission had given up, but the green bubble dome is still fun, the bunk beds serviceable, the table and benches good for many more imaginary miles of pleasure.

A smiley-face paint job completed the conversion.¹¹⁶ Elsewhere, a Volkswagen Beetle ended life as an art piece, with the back half protruding from an exterior wall to draw attention to a restaurant.¹¹⁷ Sometimes the

¹¹⁴ Interview with Chalo Colina.

¹¹⁵ Falassi and Klingman, p.81.

¹¹⁶ *Small World*, Winter 1969, p.23.

¹¹⁷ *Small World*, Fall 1968, p.13.

changes, while drastic, were only temporary, as when a Volkswagen bus was used as a provisional church, complete with curtains, rugs, and crosses.¹¹⁸

* * *

David Woodland's personal history illustrates the phenomenon of late-sixties hippie bus ownership well. Now a wealthy commercial gardener, Woodland purchased a used Volkswagen bus in 1970 after graduating from the University of Texas at Austin. He saw it listed for sale in the local classifieds, sold by a drug dealer living in South Austin. The bus was ten years old and cost \$600. Woodland claims he "always wanted one" because "It was a symbol of freedom." He owned three buses during the seventies; for him, their symbolic freedom manifested in personal mobility:

I never did the psychedelic thing. It was part of the freedom thing for some people, but the freedom for me was just having an abode anywhere, where you could pull off and have your home. They weren't campers, with the pop-tops, but that's what we used them as. We'd use bedrolls, take out the seats and sleep on the floor.

Woodland and his wife traveled the country in their buses, camping along the way. The buses not only facilitated their traveling lifestyle, but actually encouraged it:

I don't think I would have gotten into the camping without [my first bus]. We went on a lot of camping trips. It wouldn't have

¹¹⁸ *Small World*, Fall 1966, p.2.

been so easy, we would have been tenting out in the weather. In the van, in the rain... we had a little heater set up in there, and a lantern, so we could read. We didn't feel cooped up like in a tent.

Woodland appreciated the roominess of their bus. "It was spacious enough for two," he said. "We always had dogs we took with us, too. We'd open the louvered windows."

Woodland addressed an important question I asked of every Volkswagen owner: to what degree are bus owners motivated by style in purchasing their bus, relative to practical considerations? Most Volkswagen owners deny the influence of image upon their interest in Volkswagens, instead emphasizing the practicality of their bus, but I suspect that many owners are more interested in the bus's "cool" image than they will admit. For example, David Woodland claimed that "I didn't buy [my bus] to make a statement, I just liked that aspect of mobility and practicality and freedom." At the same time, he recognized the bus's popularity among his peers: "With the peace movement and civil rights movement of the '60s, the VW van was a big part of that, a vehicle that a lot of those people used. Because of the connotations, that it was associated with freedom, but also that you could take it somewhere and sleep in it. Practical and cool."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Interview with David Woodland. Austin, Texas, October 10, 2001.

Other people who bought buses in the hippie heydays also insisted that their reasons were strictly practical. Greg Thompson, who bought his 1959 panel van in 1971, explains that

There were three reasons [why I bought my bus]. One, it was cheap. I didn't have much money. It was \$512, so that would be the equivalent of maybe \$2,000 these days. Secondly, I needed something to sleep in – I had no home, so it provided me a place to sleep. And thirdly, I had a lot of life experience with VW vans already, before that time, so I was used to them, knew how to drive them, and I knew about sleeping in them, so it seemed to be a good match.¹²⁰

Regardless of his practical motivations, Thompson must have known, in choosing this van to live in, that other young people had established a precedent for living in VW buses. After all, there were plenty of other vans on the market by the late sixties, but the more conventional vans were not as commonly associated with vagabondage. Also, the combination of factors leading to his purchase of the bus – his age, his lack of money, his desire to travel and live in his bus – conform to the hippie paradigm of bus ownership. Thompson indeed lived up to the bohemian reputation of this vehicle, occasionally traveling by bus with friends to Central America for fun.

The gypsy-like culture that developed around the Volkswagen bus, with young people traveling in them all over the country and abroad, was

¹²⁰ Interview with Greg Thompson. Austin, Texas, September 12, 2001.

greatly advanced by the efforts of one particular individual. While my own approach to cultural history shuns the great-men-of-history model of historiography, John Muir nonetheless deserves special attention for single-handedly advancing the breadth and depth of bus culture. Muir, a freelance writer and former mechanical engineer, published a Volkswagen repair manual in 1969 that quickly became legendary among owners, and has since sold over two million copies in almost twenty printings. *How to Keep Your Volkswagen Alive – A Step-by-Step Manual for the Compleat Idiot* [sic] popularized the notion that anyone, regardless of prior mechanical experience, could repair his or her own Volkswagen.¹²¹ Muir's writing style is colloquial yet very clear, making his manual very approachable and understandable, and the text includes ample hand-drawn diagrams and cartoons to reinforce his directions.

Muir's text is almost spiritual, in keeping with the heady times in which he wrote it and clearly reflecting the sympathies of his audience. For example, in the introduction he writes:

Talk to the car, then shut up and listen. Feel with your car; use all of your receptive senses and when you find out what it needs, seek the operation out and perform it with love. The type of life your

¹²¹ Corroborated by interview with Chalo Colina.

car contains differs from yours... but is “Life” nonetheless. Its Karma depends on your desire to make and keep it ALIVE!”¹²²

Such lingo harmonizes with his mostly young, liberal audience and also turns Volkswagen ownership and repair into a spiritual affair.¹²³ In this sense, *How to Keep your Volkswagen Alive* doubles as a philosophic treatise, in the same vein as Robert Pirsig’s classic *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.¹²⁴ The two texts invoke Hinduism and Buddhism, respectively, in a clear reflection of a countercultural interest in Eastern spirituality as a fresher and more harmonious alternative to Christianity.

A general sense of mysticism often exists in owners’ relationship to their buses, as Ran Moran illustrates in describing his bus: “The seat belts seem to work usually, but there was a long time when you’d get into the bus and they wouldn’t work. You’d have to fiddle with it. There are things like that with Volkswagens that you can never explain, that you just have to figure out.”¹²⁵ Such mechanical quirks are due in large part to the advanced age of most surviving buses; what’s significant is that owners are willing to accept these faults, and indeed to interpret them as enhancing the character

¹²² Muir, John, *How to Keep Your Volkswagen Alive – A Step-by-Step Manual for the Compleat Idiot* (Santa Fe, NM: John Muir Publications, 1971), 3.

¹²³ This sentiment manifests elsewhere. A contributor to www.vintagebus.com tells how an acquaintance wrote the slogan “Take care of this VW, and it will take care of you” inside her bus. “How true, how true,” she writes.

¹²⁴ New York: Bantam Books, 1974.

¹²⁵ Interview with Ran Moran.

of the vehicle. Particularly in contemporary America, most personal vehicles never reach an age advanced enough to exhibit such faults, because their owners are less invested in preserving them. The impressive number of 30- and 40-year-old Volkswagen buses still in operation attests to a degree of emotional investment not found in most owner-vehicle relationships.

By learning to repair their Volkswagens personally, owners saved money on mechanics' labor charges, developed stronger ties to their vehicles, and increased their mobility by allowing themselves to travel long distances to remote locations without worrying as much about breaking down. Particularly for younger owners, the idea of saving money while developing self-reliance was tremendously liberating. For young people raised in middle-class prosperity, who could afford to purchase the labor of the working-class service sector for tasks such as car repair, doing that work oneself and saving money in the process was tremendously empowering. The enthusiasm owners felt in learning to repair their own Volkswagens was in part appreciatively directed at John Muir, who became a preeminent figure in Volkswagen culture. Muir's admirers credit his book for introducing them to the world of Volkswagens and the ethic of do-it-

yourself self-sufficiency, expressed through the ability to fix one's own bus, that infused bus culture.¹²⁶

* * *

Sometimes a featured prop, other times present only by chance and lurking in the background, the Volkswagen bus found its way into innumerable media sources tied to the hippie counterculture. The most poignant and telling references are those in which the bus's presence clearly was circumstantial. Consider a classic wall poster of the 1960s era, a photograph of several youths mugging for the camera in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. A slogan superimposed on the photograph reads "Haight-Ashbury: Better Living Through Chemistry," a reference to the neighborhood's strong association with the emergent psychedelic culture. In the background, half a dozen vehicles are visible

¹²⁶ John Muir's own eccentricities shine through in another volume of his, entitled *The Velvet Monkey Wrench* (Santa Fe, NM: John Muir Productions, 1973). Intricately illustrated in the same way as *How to Keep Your Volkswagen Alive*, this book is a psychedelic-laced manifesto declaring his vision for a utopian post-technological society. There may be a link between *The Velvet Monkey Wrench* and Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975), a novel about tampering with industrial machinery to prevent the development of natural spaces. "Monkeywrenching" refers to this process, which subsequently inspired activities by Earth First! and other environmental movements.

parked on the street. One of them, its unmistakable rounded top and split windshield poking above the crowd, is a Volkswagen bus.¹²⁷

Other photographs of Volkswagen buses in the late-sixties Haight-Ashbury are even more poignant. William Hedgepeth and Dennis Stock's *The Alternative: Communal Life in New America* includes a photo of the headquarters of the Messiah's World Commune, a New Age religious cult in the San Francisco neighborhood. Outside, a crowd of long-haired young people poses for the camera, several holding peace signs in the air. In the foreground is a Volkswagen bus, lettered on its side to help advertise their organization. The lettering reads "Messiah's World Crusade! Help bring in the new order for the ages now!" This bus's poetically extreme identification with hippies is topped off by flower decals and various dents in the bus's body, the latter suggesting its age.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, a high-school American history textbook reproduces a photograph of a split-window bus parked in the Haight-Ashbury, painted with geometric designs in multiple colors. Another plainly-painted bus is parked across the street.¹²⁹

Volkswagen buses appear by chance in many other photographs from late-

¹²⁷ Reproduced in Timothy Miller's *The Hippies and American Values*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

¹²⁸ Hedgepeth, William, and Dennis Stock, *The Alternative: Communal Life in New America* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 86-87.

¹²⁹ Berkin, Carol, et al, *American Voices. A History of the United States* (Glenview, Il.: Harper Collins, 1982), 804.

sixties Haight-Ashbury as well, including two buses evident in a photo of an outdoor concert in the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park.¹³⁰

I was equally gratified to find an unwitting Volkswagen bus reference in William Partridge's *The Hippie Ghetto: The Natural History of a Subculture*. In this book, published in 1973, Partridge studies the hippie subculture of an unnamed state university in Florida. One shot features a ramshackle two-story house frequented, apparently, by his hippie subjects. In the foreground? A Volkswagen bus, of course.¹³¹

The documented link between hippies and Volkswagen buses continues. In a collection of personal narratives on growing up with hippie parents, edited by Chelsea Cain and entitled *Wild Child: Girlhoods in the Counterculture*, buses are mentioned in passing on several occasions. Most significantly, a period photo from the early 1970s included in the book shows an infant child – the editor – sitting in a high chair with a Volkswagen bus in the background. The barn behind the bus confirms what Cain's biography states, that she grew up on a commune in Iowa.¹³²

¹³⁰ See Lisa Law's website at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/lisalaw>.

¹³¹ William L. Partridge, *The Hippie Ghetto: The Natural History of a Subculture* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 3.

¹³² Chelsea Cain, ed., *Wild Child: Girlhoods in the Counterculture* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1999).

In 1968, Nicholas von Hoffman, a reporter for the *Washington Post*, published a sensational study of the Haight-Ashbury scene. At one point he describes a young woman worrying about a friend, who “was hours late driving up from Monterey with a Volkswagen full of pot.”¹³³ Von Hoffman does not specify whether the car was a Beetle or bus, but either way the fact that the author mentions the car’s make suggests that Volkswagen carried cultural currency among his readers, and some degree of popularity among the drug-trafficking youth as well. Further, a 1970 article for the *New York Times* describes two East Coast college students “with the long hair and informal lifestyle associated with ‘hippies’” who took a six-week, 11,400-mile cross-country camping trip in a Volkswagen bus and received “generally pleasant treatment with occasional hostile reactions inspired by their appearance.”¹³⁴

In several cases we see the bus linked to important members of the countercultural vanguard in this country, though indirectly through circumstantial photographic appearances. Timothy Leary, a key pioneer during the sixties in helping popularize the use of psychedelic drugs, oversaw a group of LSD experimenters in the mid-sixties based at a country

¹³³ Nicholas Von Hoffman, *We are the People our Parents Have Warned Us Against* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Crest, 1968), 88.

¹³⁴ *New York Times*, October 4, 1970.

estate in New York. The estate, Millbrook, was a model for other, later drug-fueled communal living experiments. Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, a West Coast group with similarly supportive (though less serious) views toward psychedelic drugs, visited Leary and the Millbrook crowd in August 1964. In Kesey's *The Furthur Inquiry*, a semifictional history of the Pranksters' epic journey that summer in a psychedelically-painted 1939 International Harvester school bus, several pictures document the "summit" between East and West Coast psychedelic groups. In one picture, the uniquely window-studded roofline of a De Luxe bus peeks between the columns of Millbrook's expansive front porch.¹³⁵ This photograph, dating to 1964, offers the earliest documented example of Volkswagen buses unequivocally linked to a countercultural context. One can only speculate about the ownership and use of that bus, and wonder how close a relationship existed between the bus, the estate, and the cultural revolution fomenting on those grounds.

The appearance of Volkswagen buses among cultural and political radicals occurs elsewhere. In 1963, the year before the Kesey-Leary meeting, the up-and-coming folk singer Bob Dylan released his second album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. The album cover shows Dylan and

¹³⁵ Ken Kesey, *The Furthur Inquiry* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990), 138.

his then-girlfriend Susan Rotolo walking in New York's Greenwich Village as a blue Volkswagen panel van approaches in the background.¹³⁶

Considering that Volkswagen buses were still rare in this country in 1963, the coincidental appearance of this bus is significant because it underscores the bohemianism of their Greenwich Village location. Meanwhile, three years later, in the winter of 1966, the Beat poet and fellow psychedelic explorer Allen Ginsburg bought a VW bus with money from a Guggenheim grant to travel the country in.¹³⁷ Years later, in 1980, the radical environmental movement Earth First! was founded in a Volkswagen bus during a road trip to New Mexico. The bus belonged to Dave Foreman, a founding member of the group.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, Komozi Woodard writes in *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* how Baraka, a poet and Black Power leader, was stopped in his Volkswagen bus and beaten by police during riots in Newark in 1967.¹³⁹

Besides hippies and radicals, Volkswagen buses were also popular among surfers, who shared a similarly free-spirited and mobile lifestyle. The surfing hobby is often described in language similar to that describing

¹³⁶ Bob Dylan, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Columbia, 08786, 1963.

¹³⁷ Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), 246.

¹³⁸ *Earth First! Journal*, November-December 2000, p.9.

¹³⁹ Komozi Woodard writes in *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 80.

the vagabond hippie lifestyle, and indeed both are seen as “dropping out” of modern society when adopted full-time. Frederick Wardy, writing in John Severson’s *Great Surfing: Photos, Stories, Essays, Reminiscences, and Poems*, describes surfing as “a release from exploding tensions of twentieth-century living, escape from the hustling, bustling city world of steel and concrete, a return to nature’s reality.”¹⁴⁰

Even today, a high concentration of buses remains near the beaches of Southern California, where surfing culture remains strong and the dry weather arrests the vehicles’ corrosion from precipitation and rain.¹⁴¹

Surfers adopted Volkswagen buses because they were large enough to accommodate groups of riders and their boards, and because they could be lived in. Like hippies, surfers often were unemployed and low on cash, and also inclined to travel, so living out of their vehicles was convenient and at times necessary. In Patrick Cariou’s *Surfers*, a collection of photographs chronicling surfing culture on the West Coast and in Hawaii, Volkswagen buses appear in two photographs. In one, a young man sits in his bus

¹⁴⁰ John Severson, *Great Surfing: Photos, Stories, Essays, Reminiscences, and Poems* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967). For further personal reflections on the spiritual aspects of surfing, and the abstract parallel therein with the spiritualism of bus ownership, see Daniel Duane, *Caught It: A Surfer’s Year on the California Coast* (New York: North Point Press, 1996) and Phil Edwards, *You Should Have Been Here an Hour Ago* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

¹⁴¹ Southern California also boasts some of the largest Volkswagen clubs and Volkswagen car shows in the country, including the Orange County Transporter Organization and their yearly show. For photos, see transportergarden.com and thesamba.com.

cleaning sand off his feet, while in another a camper bus is parked near the dunes.¹⁴² Similarly, in Anders Holmquist's *The Free People*, a book of photographs published in 1969 about the hippie scene, a bus appears in one image facing the Pacific Ocean.¹⁴³ Most interestingly, the *Life* magazine photographer Bill Bridges shot a series of photographs in 1965 revolving around a Volkswagen bus for possible inclusion in an article on youth in America. The photographs, spanning several rolls of film, show a group of five young men packing their bus for a surfing excursion.¹⁴⁴

Various films also testify to the place of Volkswagen buses within 1960s hippie culture. The documentaries *Woodstock* (1970) and *Celebration at Big Sur* (1971) attest to buses' presence at these music festivals. Woodstock was the most famous mass gathering of the hippie era, held in August 1969 in upstate New York. Big Sur, California, was the site of a smaller folk festival the same year. Two books, Jack Curry's *Woodstock: The Summer of Our Lives* and Elliott Landy's *Woodstock 1969: The First Festival: Three Days of Peace and Music*, also attest photographically to the presence of buses at Woodstock, as does Lisa Law's

¹⁴² Patrick Cariou, *Surfers* (New York: PowerHouse, 1997).

¹⁴³ Anders Holmquist, *The Free People* (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1969).

¹⁴⁴ Photography collection, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. For reiteration of the bus's link to surfing culture, see, for example, Jonathan Futrell, "An A-Z of the Seaside." *The Observer*, July 6, 1997; and Howard Owens, "Palm Latitudes." *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1995.

website.¹⁴⁵ Curry's book includes a photo sequence of a group doing yoga in front of a bus in a field during the concert, and another of an elaborately painted bus, decorated with painted swirls, circles, and wings, and topped off by a backwards license plate.

1969, the same year as Woodstock and Big Sur, marked the release of two important Hollywood films that reflected the youth counterculture. Buses play significant roles in the narratives of each. In *Alice's Restaurant*, the young folk singer Arlo Guthrie stars as himself in the film adaptation of his classic antiwar song of the same name. Guthrie drives an engine-red split-window bus that features prominently in the plot. According to *MacLean's* magazine, the bus was Guthrie's own, which he used in real-life events in 1965 that inspired the movie. The bus was not deliberately selected, in this case, to signify his hippie lifestyle, though his ownership to some degree reflects that culture. In the movie, the bus becomes a symbol of his antiwar rebelliousness, accentuating his eccentric, misfit, and antiauthoritarian lifestyle – along with dropping out of college, growing his hair long, and other markers of deviance.

¹⁴⁵ New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989; Italy: Landyvision and Squarebooks, 1994; www.americanhistory.si.edu/lisalaw.

A Volkswagen bus also appears conspicuously and for indefinite reasons in the counterculture classic *Easy Rider* (1969). This film, directed by Dennis Hopper and starring Hopper and Peter Fonda, follows two young friends on an epic cross-country motorcycle ride from Los Angeles to New Orleans to attend Mardi Gras and complete a drug deal. Along the way, they experience the freedom of the road, meditate on nature, pick up hitchhikers, consume drugs, and ultimately die at the hands of reactionary Southerners. Early in the film, the two bikers stop at a commune in New Mexico, where an old white Volkswagen stands out in the otherwise natural backdrop. The filmmakers clearly placed the Volkswagen there as a prop, because it is the only vehicle in that scene apart from the lead characters' motorcycles. The likely intent behind the bus's placement in that scene, with its role as a cultural signifier of hippie living, confirms that by 1969 the link between hippies and Volkswagen buses was commonly recognized. The viewing audience would accept the Volkswagen's place at the commune as natural.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ The commune bus had precedent in reality. Hedgepeth and Stock's *The Alternative: Communal Life in New America* describes how a couple residing at the New Buffalo communal farm in Taos, New Mexico owned a bus: "They came from Southern California in a VW camper, which they used for a home up until two days ago when Ovid bought a teepee" (71). The commune portrayed in *Easy Rider* may have been modeled on New Buffalo, since those scenes were apparently filmed in Taos.

The most amusing reference to the link between hippies and Volkswagen buses comes in a *Car and Driver* article from June 1970. The article is a tongue-in-cheek parody of “the phenomenon” – “Volkswagen doesn’t understand it, used car dealers haven’t a clue” – of the bus’s popularity among “young people and the so-called militant left.” The satirical piece is purportedly written by Tom Finn, a 22-year-old co-chairman of the “Leon Trotsky Socialist Purge Committee” who denounces Students for a Democratic Society as “a pitiful group of capitalist pawns” and describes the Weathermen as “pansies.” The young man uses his bus for traveling, including attendance at the Woodstock and Altamont festivals. In a clear reflection of mainstream America’s tendency to reject youth protest and rebellion as shallow and hypocritical, given the often privileged family background of many hippies, the article mentions that Tom Finn is the son of a “well-to-do insurance executive” and “his daddy bought him the bus on his 17th birthday.”

The phrasing of “Tom Finn” in this article deserves extensive quotation given the clever way it conveys helpful information about youths’ interest in and use of the bus. Finn begins with an apology to “all my brothers [and sisters?] in the Movement... for writing in this fascist-racist pig magazine,” referring to “this propaganda sheet *Car and Driver*.” He

then asks, “So all you straights out there want to know how we use that machine [the VW bus] to advance our groovy, gentle lifestyle?” He explains that “the VW bus is the freakiest car on the scene.” Later he references mainstream Americans’ negative impression of bus-owning youth: “I see you guys making it down the freeway in your Buicks giving me the shakes when you pass me and my bus,¹⁴⁷ and then telling your old lady and your kids in their little boy scout army suits to look at the freaks in the VW bus.” The different national origins of the vehicles indicates an underlying cultural divide between young bus owners and the mainstream.

Buses have a reputation for attracting police attention because of their association with drug users. These associations were already established by 1970, as Finn’s anecdote attests:

The pigs busted me at Altamont and it all related to my bus. We were all on our way from the commune up to the concert... with a freaky hitchhiker we picked up who claimed to be a warlock. Now we are on the freeway and have been pretty freaked out because Fritz has been passing around a gallon of Mountain Vin Rose with a couple of “Reds” mixed in. Organic! So anyway, I am grooving along the freeway and I will admit to being pretty zonked – but nothing like the guys and the chick in the back. Shiek and Mona are balling by the engine, while Murph is reading an astrology table and this freaky witch is showing everybody this groovy goat’s head he is carrying around in an old army duffle. Suddenly there is this big black and white armored personnel carrier alongside me, forcing me onto the shoulder. The pigs from

¹⁴⁷ Because of their height and light weight, VW buses are known to be jittery at high speeds and/or with wind turbulence.

the california highway patrol [sic]! The pigs were all over me, checking me for tabs and keys [drugs].¹⁴⁸

While clearly hyperbolic, this passage does reflect the tradition of hippies consuming drugs while traveling in buses, and the related concern with police victimization. The wild activity inside the bus that Finn describes reflects the hedonistic and eccentric living that often occurred in and around Volkswagen buses.

Finn claims that Volkswagen buses represent freedom, “the right to freak out and get away from the uptight racists who run this country.” The film *Easy Rider* reminds us that hippies’ variation on American freedom, because it diverged from traditional American ways of living, made their lifestyle highly political. *Easy Rider* uses patriotic imagery such as a flag-painted gas tank with marijuana inside to associate the biker hippie protagonists with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The bikes and the bikers themselves symbolize freedom and other essential American values. This freedom, and the anger which their lifestyle provokes in more conservative members of society, motivates their assassination in the last scene of the film.

In similar fashion, hippies have been targeted in innumerable ways by the American mainstream for their exuberant lifestyle and dissident

¹⁴⁸ Tom Finn [pseud.], “Volkswagen Microbus: A Viewpoint,” *Car and Driver*, June 1970.

politics. Many bus owners, particularly younger ones, claim they have been singled out for driving a Volkswagen bus. David Woodland describes being stopped by the police in South Austin in his bus during the 1970s, suggesting “I think he pulled us over just because we were in a bus. The police would really scrutinize you in a bus. They assumed you had drugs.”¹⁴⁹ However, despite the persecution that sometimes results from driving Volkswagen buses, the marginalization of bus culture to some extent enhances its freedom. Inhabiting an “outsider” social position provides benefits as well as limitations, allowing one to avoid the expectations placed on more respectable strata of society.

* * *

In their urge to escape America and explore the world, and in clear continuation of the bohemian wanderings of prior Volkswagen owners, many young people traveled afar in Volkswagen buses during the late sixties and seventies. In Europe, the number of expatriate and vacationing young Americans traveling and living in buses was substantial enough that in 1973 John Wilkes wrote a book on the subject, entitled *How to Buy a Used Volkswagen in Europe, Keep it Alive and Bring it Home!* The wide availability of his book in used bookstores suggests a wide circulation at

¹⁴⁹ Interview with David Woodland.

publication, and though Wilkes does not estimate the number of Americans operating buses in Europe, the volume appears to have been significant. Greg Thompson, a local bus owner, was part of that trend. In 1969, after serving in the U.S. Army in Germany, he drove to London and there met two like-minded young men to tour Europe with. They drove “from London to Copenhagen to Oslo, up through Norway, up north of the Arctic Circle, around the top to Sweden, to Moscow, camping all the way.” Their travels continued in Eastern Europe: “We saw Romania, Bulgaria, Istanbul, Yugoslavia, Greece, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Germany.”¹⁵⁰

Wilkes’s book aided young travelers by providing helpful information about purchasing, traveling in, maintaining, and selling Volkswagen buses in Europe, including extensive appendices with lists of service dealerships, a rudimentary multilingual dictionary, and sample classified advertisements. This book reflects the growing recognition of Volkswagen buses as an interchangeable international commodity, based on their extensive distribution across multiple continents. The practical advantages behind that depth of market penetration, most notably the broad network of repair outlets available to Volkswagen owners overseas,

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Greg Thompson.

motivated earlier travelers such as the Woodin family in *A Circle in the Sun* to choose buses for foreign travel.

Wilkes obviously wrote *How to Buy a Used Volkswagen* for young hippies like himself. Most obviously, he mentions the bus's economy early on, claiming that decent buses can be had for no more than \$200, and explains how to convert them to campers oneself. He uses youth-culture terminology, such as "bread" (instead of money) and "good vibes," and makes inevitable references to "dope" and "Big Brother." Also, in a sincere variation on the sentiments expressed in the *Car and Driver* article, Wilkes mentions in passing that "Our police, as we unhappily know, delight in harassing certain varieties of American youth, and it is a matter of survival for such to be appraised of their legal options as well as their rights."¹⁵¹ Using the phrase "as we unhappily know" implies a shared understanding between reader and author, borne of the political schism between youth culture and the social and legal authorities in America. Later, in further illustration of the liberal politics that characterized Volkswagen bus owners, Wilkes sarcastically credits California governor Ronald Reagan in his acknowledgements while affirmatively mentioning Ralph Nader and the

¹⁵¹ Wilkes, *How to Buy a Used Volkswagen in Europe, Keep it Alive and Bring it Home!* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1973), 51.

film *Alice's Restaurant*. These politicized comments illustrate how Volkswagen-bus culture inevitably reflected a politically liberal attitude, given its central position within the youth counterculture.

Just as John Muir used evocative cartoons to make his repair manual approachable, *How to Buy a Used Volkswagen* is illustrated throughout with appealing drawings of a young couple. The cartoon drawings reflect the young hippie profile of many bus owners in the early seventies, most obviously in their white heterosexuality. As innumerable commentators have pointed out, often critically, the hippie counterculture, while in many ways progressive, was nevertheless demographically homogenous. These young liberals were, and continue to be, mostly middle-class and elite white heterosexuals operating under fairly traditional gender roles. Throughout the Volkswagen bus's history in this country, its owners have been overwhelmingly Anglo-American, in keeping with the whiteness of the counterculture.

Meanwhile, bus ownership has always been associated with men, possibly in part because of the buses' history of commercial applications as a truck. Women are more likely to own Beetles, which are smaller and cuter in appearance, and hence more feminized. Also, Beetles are more domestic in application, while the bus is associated frequently with

commerce and travel, both domains more historically associated with men. The bus originated as a work truck, and throughout its history continued to be used as a delivery vehicle, emergency vehicle, or as a simple pickup for hauling goods. In each case, the association with paid manual labor connotes the traditionally male realm of activity.

Also, because the buses' size made them suitable for travel, particularly with the common camper conversion, the Volkswagen bus was always associated with mobility and journeying. As women are traditionally more bound to home life because of social expectations, touring buses again carries a masculine undertone. In the words of Ran Moran, "Men are more matched to buses because they are more about mobility and utility and bulk and stuff. A single woman in a bus is pushing boundaries, potentially, because women traditionally aren't about traveling."¹⁵²

Of course, couples often shared Volkswagens. Adhering to the framework of traditional gender roles, men generally owned, operated, and maintained buses, while their wives or girlfriends rode as passengers. Oftentimes, when camping or living in buses, women have taken on the responsibility for making the bus a home, with tasks ranging from sewing

¹⁵² Interview with Ran Moran.

curtains to cooking meals. Indeed, the traditional gender roles that marked ownership and usage of Volkswagen buses held true for hippies as much as the bus owners before them. In sources from and about this era, buses are inevitably operated by men, with women sometimes as passengers.¹⁵³

The couple in Wilkes's book reiterates the hippie reputation of bus owners and the traditional gender roles of bus culture. The male character sports a ponytail, facial hair, John Lennon glasses, a flowered shirt and no shoes. His female companion is often barefoot as well. She wears an ankle bracelet, beaded necklaces, and a similarly flowered shirt, topped off by an Afro haircut. The male exhibits typically male behavior, such as working on his bus engine while drinking beer. Of course, given that by 1973, when Wilkes book was published, the hippie fashion sense his characters display had been popularized, the degree of counterculturalism of his characters is unclear.

The countercultural reputation of the Volkswagen bus, however, has persisted throughout the decades. While Volkswagen-bus culture may not

¹⁵³ For illustrations of traditional gender roles among hippie bus owners, see Norberg's *Confessions of a Dope Dealer* (San Francisco: North Mountain Publishing, 1999) and Ziper's *Cooking with the Dead: Recipes and Stories from Fans on the Road* (New York: St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1995). Many films reiterate this link between men and bus ownership, both fictional and not, including *Alice's Restaurant* (1969), *Tie-Dyed* (1995), *The Journey* (1999), *Friends Forever* (2001), and *Together* (2001). This relationship is reiterated in fiction with Gurney's *Divine Right's Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture* (Frankfort, KY: Gnomon Press, 1971) and Poulin's *Volkswagen Blues* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988).

drastically upset racial or gender divisions within society – after all, whether mainstream or hippie, young or old, most bus owners share a common gender, race, and class – the group embodies and manifests dissent on the level of lifestyle. Young hippie bus owners violated several tenets of the dominant American value system, including this country’s aversion to excess hedonism, manifested here in the form of drugs and sexual license. Though hippies claimed they were simply endorsing the American right to pursue freedom and happiness, their quest interfered with the competing imperative toward disciplined work promoted by our capitalist economy.

Volkswagen-bus culture and hippie culture more generally may have been most subversive of traditional American values in their rejection of material values. Commentators on the sixties era often point out that young people coming of age in the late sixties and early seventies grew up in an era of abundance during the fifties, and their rebellion was directed in part against the perceived shallowness and limitations of that material comfort.¹⁵⁴ Jerry Rubin, quoted in Stevens’ *Storming Heaven*, voices this common thesis of youths’ dissatisfaction: our society taught youths that ““Oh, you can get good grades, and then get a degree, then get a job in a

¹⁵⁴ Richard Flacks wrote “Who Protests: The Social Bases of the Student Movement,” in Julian Foster and Durward Long, *Protest! Student Activism in America* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1970), 134-157. In this essay, Flacks describes how student activists often came from wealthy families.

corporation, and buy a ranch house and be a good consumer.’ But kids aren’t satisfied with that. They want to be heroes. And if America denies them an opportunity for heroism, they’re going to create their own.”¹⁵⁵ This rebellion manifested itself in varying degrees of “voluntary poverty” and “voluntary simplicity,” from wearing cheap clothing to selling off one’s belongings. Traveling in a bus, particularly with more than one person or for long periods of time, facilitated or forced adherence to such values, given the crowded conditions of bus living and the vulnerability to robbery or damaged property inherent in such a lifestyle.

Volkswagen buses and their human contents symbolized the “drop-out” lifestyle of rebellion underscored by philosophic disaffection. The moral valuation of that lifestyle, whether appealing or despicable, depended on the beholder. To mainstream and conservative Americans, young hippies in buses generally symbolized an abuse of privilege and a hypocritical play at “slumming” – hence the glee commentators found in constantly pointing out hippies’ middle-class or wealthy personal background. To underprivileged Americans, hippies seemed to play at

¹⁵⁵ Stevens, 296. For further explanation of youths’ motivation in becoming liberal, see Cyril Levitt’s *Children of Privilege: Student Revolt in the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), John W. Aldridge’s *In the Country of the Young* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), Seymour Martin Lipset’s *Rebellion in the University* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1971), ch.1, and Todd Gitlin’s *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), ch.1.

poverty without truly experiencing or understanding it, and for wealthier people to reject upward mobility undermines their American Dream of personal fulfillment through higher social status. Wealthier Americans were also offended by young hippies' rejection of their privilege, because such defection from social class undermines their own standing and manifests a rejection of their value system. Particularly for parents who worked hard to attain middle-class status, seeing their own children reject that privilege aggrieved them personally.

In other words, Volkswagen buses and the dropout culture with which they have been associated were politicized because they represented a challenge to, or rejection of, the class structure in America. By living cheaply and itinerantly, hippie vagabonds in Volkswagens rejected the work-and-spend cycle that maintained the American economy, as well as the stable living situation that steady employment requires. Consumption has traditionally been linked to patriotism in this country, with the government encouraging personal consumption to sustain the economy, so to reject consumerism is unpatriotic, un-American. Even in special cases such as wartime rationing, when the government enforces limits on consumption, those limits are only temporary and at the behest of the

authorities. Dropout culture rejects consumerism for reasons independent of national exigency.

The wealth that allows contemporary Americans to enjoy such a consumptive lifestyle seems particularly pronounced in the postwar era. Americans have experienced a significantly rising standard of living ever since the onset of Industrialization in the 1840s, when the development of mass-produced goods began to democratize ownership of formerly luxurious items. Since World War Two, American prosperity has skyrocketed and our spending habits have increased apace. Most significantly, since the war the United States has experienced the sense of having a universal middle class, where all citizens apparently enjoy a minimal level of comfort and possess a staple group of consumer goods (cars, telephones, televisions, VCRs, microwaves, etc.).¹⁵⁶ With the support of commercial advertising and private industry, American culture has become dominated by consumerism. In this climate of wealth and spending, denying that wealth and rejecting those spending patterns is seriously subversive, or at least decreases one's own social status.

¹⁵⁶ Blumin, Stuart, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

The dissention of Volkswagen bus culture was grounded in part in the heavy personal modification of buses. As Roger White explains in *Home on the Road: The Motor Home in America*, when cars first gained mass acceptance in this country, in the first decades of the 20th century, modifying one's own vehicle for camping and living in it for extended trips fell well within social norms. Mainstream America accepted the practice of tinkering with one's own vehicles to make camper conversions because most cars were not factory-built for camping, and because Americans enjoyed a humbler standard of living overall, and so were less able to afford premade campers.¹⁵⁷ Part of the great appeal of Volkswagen campers, when they arrived on the scene in the 1950s, was that the manufacturer built them specifically for camping, which was more convenient and reflected well on the consumer's specialized buying power.¹⁵⁸ By the 1970s, however, as Americans became more prosperous and standards of living rose, the limited dimensions of the Volkswagen bus increasingly failed to meet the expectations of family travel. Consumers demanded more space and luxury in recreational vehicles to reflect their increased prosperity and

¹⁵⁷ Also, because there was less automotive infrastructure in the form of mechanics, service stations, and auto clubs, and because early models were less mechanically reliable than modern cars, American car owners in the first decades of the twentieth century were necessarily more self-reliant with their cars.

¹⁵⁸ White, 133-135.

higher aspirations of social status. Larger and costlier recreational vehicles (RVs) satisfied this demand beginning in the sixties.¹⁵⁹

With middle-class American families graduating to larger vehicles for camping and long-distance travel, the Volkswagen bus was left to poorer individuals, namely young hippies. The popularity of RVs compounded the stigma that already accrued to traveling and living in Volkswagens. Particularly as the age of used Volkswagen buses rose, and as many became more beat-up and eccentric in appearance, the buses seemed increasingly derelict to wealthy Americans. The somewhat seedy reputation of Volkswagen-bus culture in recent decades is personified most clearly in the *Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* cartoon, which I describe below. Not all Volkswagens were stigmatized, of course. A hierarchy exists within bus culture, with newer and better-maintained buses carrying greater social respectability. The advent of the hippie buses exacerbated this sliding scale of status among bus owners and their vehicles, though within the counterculture's antithetical value system, the dereliction of one's bus could bring increasing status, so in fact two contradictory status systems operated at once.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., chs. 6 and 7.

Volkswagen bus culture reflects the dropout ethic but also more specifically reflects a shift in American attitudes toward automobiles. In contemporary America, most cars are relatively new and are valued in part on their newness, and moreover, almost all show little or no sign of personal modification. The practice of substantially modifying the interior or exterior of one's vehicle to enhance its utility or visual appeal has become, if not less common, at least more professionalized since the 1960s. Homemade paint jobs or homelike interior decoration (with curtains, for example) are rare in contemporary America. Bumper stickers, long associated with Volkswagen buses, have even gone out of fashion, perhaps seeming too tacky nowadays because they express personal politics in a relatively depoliticized era of American history. In their place is a prime valuation of newness and brand identification for automobiles. This sterile homogeneity has settled upon America as a by-product of our prosperity; in this cultural context, it is not surprising that old, colorful, or personalized vehicles stand out and may provoke ostracism.

Chapter Five: Building the Legacy

Not everyone who drove a Volkswagen bus during and after “the sixties” was a hippie, and most buses were not decorated as hippie buses with bumper stickers, colorful paint jobs, and lived-in interiors. In fact, by the seventies, despite the undercurrent of countercultural associations for a subset of bus owners, the Volkswagen bus had entered the American mainstream. For example, Bob and Lynn Thurmond, who have owned their bus since 1965, testified that in the seventies the camper buses were common among Girl Scout parents. “Those were pretty popular,” they explained. “As long as [the buses] didn’t have flower decorations, you weren’t considered radical.” The buses became normal through increasing familiarity. As the Thurmonds explain, “Buses were accepted by the seventies. They had been around, everyone had seen them, saw that they seemed to run OK.”¹⁶⁰ Of course, mainstream buses and mainstream owners were not as colorful as the hippies. Understandably, then, the vast majority of sources relating to Volkswagen buses in the post-hippie era focus on the conspicuous minority of bus owners – hippies, bohemians,

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Bob and Lynn Thurmond.

travelers, dropouts – who made the bus’s reputation and built on its cultural legacy.

At the risk of overemphasizing the cultural presence of a minority and thus skewing readers’ impression of Volkswagen owners as a whole, in this chapter I focus primarily on the hippie-bus phenomenon. In this context, hippie-bus culture becomes synonymous with Volkswagen-bus culture as a whole. My reasons for this reduction are twofold. First, the hippie-bus lifestyle is thoroughly documented, unlike the less conspicuous and less differentiated lifestyle of mainstream bus owners, so my sources naturally skew my analysis. Rather than plotting a statistically representative history of Volkswagen buses and their owners, this thesis analyzes their cultural representation, which skews toward the most distinctive manifestations of that culture.

In the seventies the corporation launched an advertising campaign to reassert the wholesomeness of their vehicle. Probably sensing that their brand image had declined in prestige with the unexpected wave of young used-bus owners that started in the late sixties, Volkswagen’s advertising during the seventies contrasted sharply with the Doyle Dane Bernbach campaign, emphasizing family values instead of quirkiness. A typical advertisement from 1979, for example, shows a happy-looking family of

seven in and around a bus, and the accompanying text begins, “Family transportation should be a pleasure.” In the background hangs a conspicuous American flag, creating an overall sense of all-American middle-class respectability.¹⁶¹ Where the DDB ads from the sixties differed greatly from ads for American cars, in part for their starkness and lack of human subjects, the seventies ads, with their visual interest and contentedly conservative tone, more closely approximated ads for their American counterparts. Volkswagen advertising remained conventional until the 1990s, when the corporation again asserted the colorful reputation of the bus in nostalgic form.

Another late-seventies ad shows a family of seven loading their bus for a vacation. The photograph shows a row of small detached houses on a tree-lined suburban street, complete with immaculate lawns and shrubbery. This advertisement contrasts sharply with the 1964 bus ad showing a suburban street filled with buses, presenting the bus as an antidote to suburban conformity. By the late seventies, Volkswagen’s automobiles had been integrated into the American mainstream such that the bus seems entirely at home in this suburban environment. Whereas previous ads sought to distance the bus from American station wagons, their only market

¹⁶¹ Volkswagen of America, 1979.

competition, in this ad the neighbors' houses both display station wagons, showing that the bus is still different yet equivalent.¹⁶²

While the corporation and most bus owners coasted by on respectability, an increasingly visible and colorful VW bus cult developed during the seventies, thriving at a crossroads of car culture and gypsy culture. Armed with dog-eared copies of *How to Keep your Volkswagen Alive* and their sleeping bags, adventurous youths traveled the country in buses for recreation and adventure. Buses provided an inexpensive means of "broadening one's horizons" through travel, while the cultural legacy growing around them made buses fashionable among youthful peers and conducive to fun. Buses were associated with partying, in a broad sense of the term, understood as friendship, community, adventure, music, sex, and consumption of mind-altering substances.¹⁶³

For young people involved in the counterculture scene, owning a Volkswagen bus was a significant status symbol. Within the contrarian value system of the counterculture, Volkswagen buses were "cool" because of their underdog status. As buses became increasingly linked to the hippie counterculture, owning one brought the individual closer to personifying the

¹⁶² Seume, 106.

¹⁶³ See Sheldon Norberg's *Confessions of a Dope Dealer*, for example, where Volkswagen buses complement a broader lifestyle of drug consumption, leisure travel, and socialization.

archetypal hippie image. This embodiment, however based on abstraction and stereotype, appealed to people culturally invested and socially involved in the hippie lifestyle.

Bus owners also drew respect among peers because buying and maintaining a bus required monetary and intellectual capital. Personal vehicles are a mobile and highly visible consumer item, and hippies were not immune to the status seeking and conspicuous consumption underpinning ownership of such items. Of course, owning a Volkswagen bus of the hippie sort – older, well worn, imbued with character – is generally regarded as an anti-consumerism statement, because of the vehicle's proletarian reputation, its practicality, and its humble looks. The contradictory status conveyed by hippie buses reflects the conflicted democratic and elitist impulses within hippie culture.

The social status conveyed by a hippie bus rested not on its costliness or glamour but on the countercultural ideal of spartan utility that it embodied, as well as its reflection of the lifestyle of free-spirited traveling suggested by ownership. Indeed, in the anti-consumerist value system manifested in the hippie movement, an individual's ability to find objects cheaply, particularly to get a good deal through one's personal network, conveys status. Examples of individuals buying replacement parts or entire

buses for obscenely low prices are legendary, particularly in the seventies and eighties when buses were more common, and within the value system of bus culture, one's ability to find such deals brings attention and respect in one's peers.¹⁶⁴ Not coincidentally, this hippie value system imitated poor people's response to economic neediness, though sometimes here on a more voluntary level, hence "voluntary poverty" or "voluntary simplicity." The voluntary-simplicity movement that spun off from the hippie movement, and which gained coherence as a lifestyle during the seventies, represented a deliberate lifestyle choice among middle-class people to reject middle-class consumption patterns. Witness the popularity of communal living, cooperative groceries, home gardening, bartering, riding bikes instead of driving cars, and making one's own clothes or buying them used. Rejecting a consumerist lifestyle accords with the progressive values of the counterculture because such consumption patterns are less hierarchical, more community-oriented, and less environmentally impactful.

¹⁶⁴ Greg Thompson had one such experience: "When I was in college I ended up rooming with a guy from Costa Rica, and he wanted to go visit his family there, but he didn't have any money to do it. So we agreed to find a way to get down to Costa Rica cheap. While we were wondering how to do that, one of the people in this group was walking along the sidewalk of the courthouse square, when a VW bus pulled into the parking space beside him, and a man stepped out furious, looked around, spotted this student, and said 'You want a VW van?' and he said 'Well, ok' and the guy thrust into his hand the title and the keys, stormed off down the sidewalk, and was never seen again. This is the kind of thing that happens in stories, and never in real life, but this really happened. We ended up with a 1953 VW bus with a sunroof, 23 window." Interview with Greg Thompson.

The popularity of Volkswagen buses was based on more than image, of course. Buses attracted friends because they facilitated travel and fun for others, particularly youths too poor to own a vehicle, much less a travel-worthy and party-conducive one. Young people were able to embark on “road trips” during breaks from school, after graduation, or while unemployed. The idea of traveling attracted young people because the lifestyle suits these transitional periods in life, since the mobility and frequent unpredictability of traveling creates a liminal state of living conducive to personal growth and dependent on lack of responsibility.

In the traveling lifestyle, spontaneous and unusual behaviors are tolerated because the lifestyle’s inherent mobility often excuses the individual from accountability. “Living in the moment” is more possible because the present is relatively disconnected from a social context, and life’s infinite possibilities seem more immediately manifest. Consequently, traveling suits the coming-of-age needs of conflicted and complex modern youth, whether “hippie” or otherwise, being suitable to working through personal problems, exploring the self, or simply “blowing off steam.” There are many parallels between traveling in a bus and hiking the Appalachian Trail, for example; in both cases, the adventure is focused on discovery and experimentation and founded on open-minded rootlessness.

The clearest example of traveling in a bus as rite of passage is Eric Saperston's *The Journey* (1999), as I discuss below.

The traveling, drug-taking, countercultural lifestyle of VW bus ownership became most associated with the Grateful Dead and their cult following. The Grateful Dead, a major psychedelic-rock group that emerged from the San Francisco hippie scene of the late sixties, inspired a devoted following of "Deadheads" that lasted for thirty years until the group disbanded following the death in 1995 of Jerry Garcia, the lead singer and guitarist. Because of their constant countrywide touring, the response their music evoked in fans, and the carnivalesque atmosphere that developed around their concerts, many people followed the Grateful Dead on tour. Touring was a key element of the Deadhead scene, providing a core constituency of extra-devoted fans around which a colorful and involved subculture developed.

Volkswagen buses were a key presence within the Deadhead scene. In the words of David Shenk and Steve Silberman, authors of *Skeleton Key: A Dictionary for Deadheads*, Volkswagens are "archetypal deadmobiles."¹⁶⁵ This identification was strong enough that when Jerry Garcia died, *Rolling*

¹⁶⁵ Shenk and Silberman, *Skeleton Key: A Dictionary for Deadheads* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 303.

Stone magazine described how at his public memorial in Candlestick Park, San Francisco, “sleeping bags dotted the lawn, and fleets of Volkswagen minibuses lurked in the woods.”¹⁶⁶ His death had a devastating effect on Deadheads and hippies more generally, since over the course of his musical career, Jerry Garcia acquired and sustained – with no active intent on his own part – a worshipful following within the expansive post-sixties counterculture.

The Volkswagen corporation commemorated Garcia’s death with an advertisement that evokes the hippie-bus connection with his fan base. On page 15 of the same *Rolling Stone* issue, facing an advertisement for a new Red Hot Chili Peppers record, and following ads for Ralph Lauren, Microsoft, Tommy Hilfiger, Marlboro, Nordstrom, and Chanel, ran a stark and compelling pencil-drawn Volkswagen advertisement. In great contrast to the surrounding pages, the ad is dominated by white space. In its center is a head-on representation of the first-generation Volkswagen bus, drawn in sparing strokes, while under the image, in clean and small type, reads “Jerry Garcia. 1942-1995.” The drawing and accompanying text are all

¹⁶⁶ Alec Foege, “Funeral for a Friend.” *Rolling Stone*, September 21, 1995, p. 24.

black in color, except for a conspicuous blue-colored tear coming from the right headlight (the “eye”) of the bus.¹⁶⁷

While the minimalist appearance of the “crying Jerry” advertisement evokes the self-consciously stark style of the 1960s DDB campaign, the bus cries at Jerry’s death because it has lost a friend. The ad sentimentalizes the already strong historical association between Volkswagen buses and the Grateful Dead, via Jerry Garcia, given the bus’s status among as the tour vehicle of choice. The fact that in 1995 Volkswagen expected *Rolling Stone* readers to recognize their rough drawing of the original Volkswagen bus, which the automaker stopped producing almost three decades earlier, speaks to the continuing familiarity of this icon within American culture.

Nostalgia for the first generation of hippie Volkswagen buses and the cultural revolution they are associated with, as well as a continued appreciation of the buses’ practical qualities, also explains the continued popularity of the VW bus among Deadheads. Volkswagen buses fit the touring lifestyle perfectly because they were cheap, fashionable, and could be lived in while traveling. Individuals, couples, or groups of friends and acquaintances would travel together from show to show in buses, for the duration of a tour. Many Grateful Dead fans, because of their youthfulness,

¹⁶⁷ Volkswagen of America, 1995. See *Rolling Stone*, September 21, 1995, p.15.

were too poor to afford much else, while others chose Volkswagen buses primarily for their practicality and their cultural resonance within the scene.

The countercultural associations with the Volkswagen bus extend far beyond the Deadhead subculture, of course. The fact is, however, that beginning in the 1970s, the terms “hippie” and “Deadhead” became somewhat synonymous, given the extent to which the Grateful Dead scene came to dominate the lifestyle and iconography of hippie culture. The band as a whole, ever since the mid-seventies or so, became a staple element of American hippie culture, and following them on tour became a preeminent rite-of-passage within the counterculture. Dead tour provided a physical space for maintaining the lifestyle and values of the counterculture. In the succinct words of Douglas Coupland, “Dead concerts. Without them, the sixties would be extinct.”¹⁶⁸ Partly because of the constant touring of this band, year after year, the Grateful Dead tour became the most visible national concentration of hippie culture. Through their link with the touring lifestyle, buses in particular created a recognizable and evocative space for sustaining the counterculture, on a more private level than the Dead tour as a whole.

¹⁶⁸ Douglas Coupland, *Portraits from the Dead* (New York: Regan Books, 1996), 46.

The ubiquitous presence of Volkswagen buses among Deadheads is documented in books and many other forms of media. The photographs in Elizabeth Zipern's book *Cooking with the Dead: Recipes and Stories from Fans on the Road* show a dozen examples of VW buses on tour, and buses appear in several of her biographical sketches of Deadheads. One photograph pictures a young man, adorned by dreadlocks, a large beard, and sandals, selling homemade vegetarian hummus outside his van, in all respects embodying the hippie-Deadhead-bus-owner stereotype. Similarly, Zipern describes a young man named Matt who fits the VW-driving Deadhead cliché perfectly, down to the pet dog (named after Bob Marley, another hippie hero). She writes, "Matt is a nomadic person. Living out of his house, a '71 red Volkswagen microbus, he keeps all his belongings, including a fishing pole, snow skis, and all the necessities needed for his traveling companion, his Shepherd-wolf mix, Marley." The author comments elsewhere that "The Volkswagen microbus is known to be the classic hippie car, and there are enough of them on tour to prove it."¹⁶⁹

The video documentary *Tie-Dyed: Rock n' Roll's Most Deadicated Fans* (1995), which documents life on the road following the Grateful Dead, includes innumerable examples of Volkswagen buses in that subculture. In

¹⁶⁹ Zipern, 94, 96.

one scene, three long-haired young men squat on the ground behind their buses playing didgeridoos, an Australian aboriginal instrument popular within the hippie community. The “generation X” writer Douglas Coupland, in a fictional collection of short stories titled *Polaroids from the Dead*, exploits the bus’s hippie reputation in full. In one story, he describes a five-color 1971 VW microbus adorned with an upside-down U.S. flag and stuffed with Kurt Vonnegut novels, details that underscore the reputation for cultural alienation and philosophic liberalism within Deadhead/VW-bus culture. Another story describes a young family that traveled by bus from the Sierra Nevada mountains to Oakland, California, to see the Dead. After the show, the woman waits in the parking lot with her child while her partner collects his wits following a psychedelic episode. The couple embraces a Luddite lifestyle in a rural cabin they built themselves; the mother gave birth in a rented bathing pool rather than a hospital.¹⁷⁰

A recent road-trip documentary also testifies to the strong link between Grateful Dead culture and Volkswagen buses. Eric Saperston’s *The Journey* (1999) follows his epic five-year travels around the country, accompanied at various times by friends, living out of a 1971 bus. The story begins after his college graduation when, lacking clear plans for the

¹⁷⁰ Coupland, 16, 56.

future and seeking an indulgent activity to occupy himself until he found his calling, he bought his bus and joined the Dead tour for the summer. The first few minutes of the film show Saperston on tour, including shots of him selling grilled cheese to raise pocket money, a common practice among poor Deadheads looking for traveling expenses. (*Cooking with the Dead* testifies to this phenomenon with several recipes for grilled cheese, including one from Matt, the young man living in a bus with his dog.)

Saperston soon abandons touring with the Dead, having latched onto a plan to interview successful people about “the meaning of life” to find inspiration for his own. He decides to film a documentary of his emerging coming-of-age quest. The journey finishes climactically with a visit to Ken Kesey, a “father” of hippie culture, in Oregon.¹⁷¹ After sleeping in Kesey’s psychedelic bus *Further* for the night, Saperston decides his journey is complete. While only the first section of the film explicitly links Saperston to Deadhead/hippie culture, the underlying themes of maturation, friendship, and traveling make that link perfectly clear. After all, the mythology of young people traveling the country in Volkswagen buses is

¹⁷¹ Ken Kesey and *Further* figure prominently in the development of the sixties counterculture and of the hippie-bus aesthetic generally. Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters pioneered all the combination of elements seen in hippie-bus culture: friends, drugs, eccentric paint and clothing, and travel, and activities underscored by feelings of liberation, adventure, and deviance.

generally understood as a coming-of-age ritual, a pleasurable and relatively responsibility-free liminal activity for young people in transition to adulthood.

Over the years, news media have reported frequently on the link between Volkswagen buses and Deadheads; even when merely regurgitating stereotypes, those stereotypes reflect a shared understanding of that cultural link. One article describes a politician only as a “quasi-Deadhead” because “He drives a Honda Accord, not a flower-powered Volkswagen bus.” Another describes “the busloads of Deadheads who travel in Volkswagen trains from one concert to another,” while a *USA Today* article about drug convictions among the Deadhead subculture highlights the case of “a young, free-spirited hippie” whose “only possessions were his clothes, a dog, and a 1970 Volkswagen bus painted with peace signs.” Of an Illinois Dead concert in 1995, a reporter wrote “The night before the Dead’s two concerts, tents and wildly painted vintage Volkswagen vans appeared overnight,” while another writer reports that “Volkswagen vans fill the parking lot out back” during a Venice Beach, Los Angeles, concert for a Dead cover band.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Sunsannah Vesey, “Deadhead in the House?” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, June 17, 1992, D2; Paul Levy, “Fixing their Wagons.” *Star Tribune*, August 5, 1992, 1E; Dennis Cauchon, “Attack on Deadheads is no Hallucination.” *USA Today*, December 17,

The stereotype of Deadheads driving Volkswagen buses has been reflected in and reinforced through popular artwork, as well. At one time, an entire cottage industry thrived on selling colorful Deadhead window stickers and t-shirts to fans. The stickers were intended for the inside of car windows, used to proclaim one's Deadhead identity in the same way as wearing Deadhead clothing. In either case, much of this artwork portrays VW buses on tour. One sticker presents Jerry Garcia himself driving a bus, flashing the inevitable peace sign, with a dancing Dead bear as passenger. The initials "GD" replace the Volkswagen crest on the bus's hood, and the license plate reads "GR8FUL," while the bus's sagging tires presumably indicate the load of belongings they are carrying on tour. Another sticker shows a Volkswagen in camping mode. As the morning sun rises over mountains, the bus sits with its sleeping loft still elevated from the night's slumber. Below the drawing, a Grateful Dead song lyric reinforces the popularly imagined spiritual link between the Grateful Dead, VW buses, and nature. The link with nature reflects the tendency toward touring natural attractions such as National Parks and Forests among road-tripping bus owners, while also indicating how buses, the Deadhead subculture, and

1992, 11A; Tom Uhlenbrock, "Grateful Chesterfield." *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, July 2, 1995, 1B; Tracy Johnson, "Alive with Deadheads." *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1998, F40

nature were seen by hippies as vestiges of authenticity contrasted with the banality and superficiality of modern living.

A third window sticker highlights a tradition within the Deadhead scene of personalizing travel vehicles by grafting Volkswagens onto larger buses. Such modifications added to interior height and volume, provided more light, and increased the “cool” quotient of the vehicle. One sticker shows two dancing bears speeding through the woods in an old school bus sporting a VW bus welded on top. A stovepipe protrudes from the rear of the bus, confirming that the bus has become a gypsy-like home.¹⁷³ This type of bus-grafting conversion was common within the touring-vehicle subculture, as photographs from Dead tour testify.¹⁷⁴

In the 1990s, various rock bands followed the Grateful Dead’s lead and developed similarly devoted hippie-like fan bases revolving around a lifestyle of touring, drug-taking, and music-listening. Phish is the most prominent example of the post-Dead touring groups, and Volkswagen buses are common among their fans as well. Dave Thompson’s band history *Go Phish*, for example, describes bootleg records of Phish shows as “another side effect of the audience’s affinity with the Deadhead community, like the

¹⁷³ Examples from www.ebay.com.

¹⁷⁴ See www.vwfilms.net for an example.

tie-dye shirts, the patchouli and Volkswagen buses which already followed Phish around.” Thompson later describes a group of friends on tour, driving to the next concert: “Stopping only to relieve themselves and refuel, they drove through the night, passing all the VW Westphalias [campers] with their Steal Your Face and dancing-bear stickers.” Some of his references are more obtuse, but nonetheless reinforce the central place of VW buses in the Phish scene: “Three thousand people converged upon a city that isn’t even the size of a city block, and way more than half of them don’t have tickets to do anything but schwill taddies [sell beer] and dance to ‘Shakedown Street’ [a Dead song] bein’ pumped outta that phat microbus with the [stereo] system in the back.”¹⁷⁵

Paralleling the Grateful Dead and Phish associations with VW buses, many artistic representations of the vehicle highlight the image of drug consumption among bus owners. The most reductionistic characterization of hippie culture, of course, is the trademark consumption of marijuana and psychedelics within this community. Many contemporary wall posters of VW buses capitalize upon this connection by superimposing colorful fractal patterns and bubbles over photographs of buses; these visual markers signify the hallucinatory visual experience of LSD. One poster

¹⁷⁵ Dave Thompson, *Go Phish* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997), 86, 210, 207.

evokes the psychedelic essence of bus culture by labeling a bus “magic,” while another poster makes the drug-taking associations explicit with a “TRIP” license plate, complete with sixties-San Francisco font. A third poster features a marijuana leaf drawn on the bus’s hood, while another shows a colorfully-painted hippie bus speeding down the road. The tagline to that poster, “Takin’ a trip,” provides a double entendre to underscore the bus’s dual traditions of drug-taking and road-tripping.¹⁷⁶

To some extent the reputation for drug use in association with Volkswagen buses extends to the manufacturer as a whole, partly because Volkswagen Beetles were also associated with the counterculture, albeit to a much lesser and more benign extent. In a particularly interesting example of the brand’s association with drug use, one window sticker shows a distorted VW logo that evokes the common sensation under LSD of seeing objects “melt.”¹⁷⁷ The water-droplet shape also makes reference to the outdoorsy connection with VW ownership.

In some cases, Volkswagen buses appear in documentary sources in the context of non-hippie-specific long-distance travel, though the broader cultural umbrella is shared. Dayton Duncan’s 1987 travelogue *Out West*:

¹⁷⁶ Examples from www.ebay.com

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

An American Odyssey, for example, describes how he retraces the route of Lewis and Clark's 1804-06 Western expedition. He lives out of a 1970s camper bus along the way, underscoring the degree to which the bus at some point in its development became as all-American as Lewis and Clark and as equally at home in the West.¹⁷⁸ Peter Beagle and Michael Bry's *The California Feeling*, published in 1969, documents their travels around California in a VW bus, complete with a homemade conversion from passenger vehicle to camper.¹⁷⁹ Among other things, this book reinforces the special link between buses and that state, as the original and continuing locus of the hippie counterculture. A Volkswagen bus stars in the recent documentary film *Friends Forever* (2001), as well, in which director and cameraman Ben Wolfensohn follows two friends on tour as they perform music inside their van.

Like the buses in *Easy Rider* (1969) and *Alice's Restaurant* (1969), Volkswagens have appeared since the seventies as a countercultural prop in comics, novels, narrative films and advertising. The buses in these media generally accentuate their narrative context by playing off popular perceptions of the link between VW buses and the counterculture,

¹⁷⁸ New York: Viking, 1987.

¹⁷⁹ Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969.

undoubtedly both reflecting and reinforcing that cultural link in the eyes of audiences. In determining to what degree media representations of hippie buses have influenced the ground-level culture of hippie buses, I note that among my interviewees the younger bus owners were much more aware of the hippie reputation, and more motivated by it in choosing their purchase. Owners who bought their buses in the sixties and seventies uniformly claimed they bought their buses for practicality rather than image.

Gilbert and Dave Shelton's underground cult comic *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* uses Volkswagen buses extensively, linking buses to the drug-laced counterculture through endearing yet unflattering representations of the protagonists' drug-addicted lifestyle. In the fourth issue, for example, published in 1980, the three Freak Brothers evade overdue rent on their tenement apartment – which is unkempt and barren because they spend all their money on drugs – and escape to Mexico in their split-window bus. The bus sports a peace sign on front instead of the Volkswagen crown, a common visual blending of cultural symbols seen elsewhere in art and on some real-life buses. During their drug-addled travels in Mexico, they bribe officials to avoid getting inspected at the border, attract the wrath of a retired U.S. general after flirting with his daughter, and end up falsely imprisoned for cocaine possession. After

escaping with the help of Don Longjuan, “the notorious Yaqui Indian witch-doctor,” they accidentally discover a U.S.-government-run heroin operation and face a firing squad before the mystic figure rescues them again.

The Freak Brothers’ poverty, unkempt appearance, constant drug use, and antagonistic relationship with legal authorities reiterate common characteristics of the stereotypical hippie lifestyle. With such shiftless characters as these, on an adventure as reckless and uncoordinated as theirs, what else could they drive but a bus? In other issues of *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*, mostly centered on city living, the brothers drive other vehicles, which suggests that their long-distance journey to Mexico differentiates that story and thus merits the bus. In their first issue, the Brothers are menaced at the polling booth by John Birch Society vigilantes who refer to them as “anarchist terrorists” and “communist revolutionaries” because of their Volkswagen Beetle. Their run-ins with conservatives and legal authorities hint at the cultural marginalization of hippie-bus culture, given the deviant threat such people represented to other factions of society. Of course, lest we pity the Freak Brothers as victims, the comic reminds us

that their underdog status is self-inflicted through their deliberate and voluntary choice of lifestyle.¹⁸⁰

In recent literature and film, as well, Volkswagen buses often function as props in hippie-focused narratives. In the 1987 Harlequin romance novel *Night and Day*, for example, a bohemian woman falls in love with a stuffy bank vice-president who helps her trade in her Beetle for a bus. Elena lives alone in a hand-built cabin in the woods, where she makes pottery and grows vegetables; Matt lives in the city, wears nice clothes, and drives a Mercedes. The Mercedes underscores his wealth, while the bus accentuates her hippie identity, heightening the contrast between their lives and reminding us that Volkswagens have traditionally been a middle-class brand at best. Elena fits the drop-out mold perfectly, having worked as a commodities banker before becoming disenchanted with work and alienated from her conservative parents, and subsequently choosing to adopt her back-to-the-earth lifestyle.

Matt is shocked that a woman would drive such a large and utilitarian vehicle, while Elena is defensive. Their reactions reiterate the gendered identity of the bus, since men generally own these vehicles. For

¹⁸⁰ Giulbert Shelton, *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* (Auburn, CA: Rip Off Press, 1980).

Elena, her liberated attitude toward gender roles extends beyond the bus to a generalized sense of feminism, reflecting on the progressive reputation of Volkswagen bus owners. Matt's female high-society friends are fascinated by Elena, who embodies the exotic outsider for them, while Elena feels uncomfortable among the women because they feel "phony" and too traditional. She reacts incredulously to the women's demurring behavior, exclaiming "And they're of my generation! That scares me."¹⁸¹ Elena's progressivism extends to an awareness of and vocal activism on the subject of racism, as she denounces Matt's boss for his insensitive comments about African-Americans. In her relationship with Matt, Elena tenaciously defends her independent lifestyle, only falling in love with him when he agrees to move in with her and live on her terms. Overall in this book, buses are associated with a basket of liberal cultural and political traits, including feminism, social consciousness, and artistry. Also, on a scale of Nature versus Civilization, the woodsy potter and her bus represent the former, reiterating a broader link between hippies, buses, and the back-to-nature movement.

Other literary sources use Volkswagen buses as countercultural props. Gurney Norman's 1972 novel *Divine Right's Trip: A Novel of the*

¹⁸¹ Janice Kay Johnson, *Night and Day* (New York: Harlequin Books, 1987), 85.

Counterculture follows the wild adventures of a young nomad in his VW bus, “Urge,” which also carries a peace symbol on front. He buys the bus cheaply with cash collected “from a big grass score” and drives it until bus and boy are exhausted. The sentient bus complains that his irresponsible owner fails to maintain him well, reflecting another stereotypical characteristic of hippie bus owners.¹⁸² In the words of Brent Christensen, a local bus owner, “A lot of owners are into the vehicle, not into the maintenance, so they drive it as long as they can before it craps out. I would imagine that a lot of buses were killed by partying.”¹⁸³

A Volkswagen bus also stars in Jacques Poulin’s 1984 novel *Volkswagen Blues*, which tells the adventures of a free-spirited young couple – the young man picks her up hitchhiking – traveling and living in his bus. Evoking the gender dynamics of *Night and Day*, the male protagonist in Poulin’s novel is impressed by the girl’s adeptness at driving the bus, since buses are notoriously underpowered and sometimes difficult to handle. In other books, Volkswagen buses are also used in to underscore the hippie-ness of characters’ lifestyles. For example, a reviewer for *Kirkus Reviews* describes a book character as “The offspring of hippie parents who

¹⁸² Gurney Norman, *Divine Right’s Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture* (Frankfort, KY: Gnomon Press, 1971).

¹⁸³ Interview with Brent Christensen. Austin, Texas, September 16, 2001.

fed her kelp and sand, dressed her in grotty overalls, and home-schooled her in a Volkswagen bus while they toured the country selling homeopathic remedies in search of a commune.”¹⁸⁴

In film, Volkswagen buses appear most commonly in scenes recreating the Woodstock festival. In the oversimplified cultural legacy conveyed by these films, the bus and Woodstock are symbolically linked as essential icons of the sixties era. *The ‘60s* (1999) and *Forrest Gump* (1994), two recent nostalgia pieces on that era, both show hippies with VW buses at the concert. The films enlist the whole panoply of hippie-bus-culture stereotypes, both fair and exaggerated. Rebellious youths, bedecked in eccentric and extroverted clothing, are shown living out of colorfully painted buses, indulging in drugs and music, and coming of age in the process.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) presents a slight variation in theme, reiterating the elements of drugs and eccentricity but updating the context from sixties hippies to seventies surfers. In one famous scene, the surfer/stoner Jeff Spicoli (Sean Penn) and friends stumble out of his bus after a pot-smoking session conducted before school in the parking lot.

Meanwhile, in the narrative film *Together* (2001), set in early-1970s

¹⁸⁴ Leslie Stella, “Fat Bald Jeff.” *Kirkus Reviews*, January 1, 2001.

Sweden, a group of friends living together in a communal house own two buses. The buses' presence in that context reflects to some degree the youthful, liberal, nomadic lifestyle of the commune residents.

Over the years, news media have linked Volkswagen buses to a wide variety of hippie-culture stereotypes as well. From a 1993 Florida newspaper article: "Say that someone's an organic farmer, and many people think of an aging hippie with beard, sandals and love beads who sells carrots from the back of a Volkswagen bus." *USA Today* wrote in 1995 that Volkswagen buses "came to be associated with hippies, love beads and peace decals." *The Seattle Times*, meanwhile, states that the VW bus is a vehicle "no self-respecting hippie would be without."¹⁸⁵

The hippie reputation of Volkswagen buses is evident among the most mundane of pop-culture artifacts. The online auction site eBay is filled with examples of hippie-bus-themed keychains, Matchbox toys, window decals, stickers, and even hippie-bus lamps and clay jars. The themed trinkets, and the enthusiastic way the auctioneers emphasize their hippie character in relation to VW buses, reiterates how many people – filmmakers, authors, advertisers, and the Volkswagen corporation – have

¹⁸⁵ Debbie Moose, "Organic Farmers Try to Cut Costs, Boost Marketing." *Times-Picayune*, July 18, 1993, B5; Jayne O'Donnell, "Minivan's Origin Rests with Volkswagen." *USA Today*, February 13, 1995, 2E; Tom Stockley, "From VWs to Wine, Vinter Does Things Right." *Seattle Times*, May 29, 1996, F2

sought to capitalize on the bus's hippie legacy. On eBay, sellers often emphasize the bus's hippie legacy to help sell their merchandise, as when a seller describes a "super clever 60's Hippie Van Cookie Jar" that "brings back memories – Love, Peace, and Happiness." In some cases, sellers invoke the hippie history for goods with no direct relation to that aesthetic, such as old bus advertisements.¹⁸⁶

* * *

Innumerable corporations, including Volkswagen of America, have sought to cash in on Volkswagen's "cool" legacy by using hippie-bus imagery in their advertisements. The television ads for several companies place Volkswagen buses in picturesque Western landscapes, evoking the association of buses with travel, though the goods being marketed in these ads are not directly related to the bus or the geographic context. A 1998 JC Penney advertisement shows a hippie-decorated bus, topped with the inevitable peace sign on front, in a Western scene, while a CDNow ad from 2000 shows a bus in the desert, with a Doors song playing in the background. A third advertisement, for an internet firm, shows a bus out

¹⁸⁶ Examples from www.ebay.com.

West covered with bumper stickers, reflecting the common occurrence of buses plastered with political and Deadhead bumper stickers.¹⁸⁷

Ads for Target (1998) and a perfume maker show young people socializing in buses, reflecting the generally youthful image of this vehicle. In the music video for Diamond Rio's song "Unbelievable," a shiny Volkswagen bus adds glamour and style to an otherwise uninteresting backdrop. In a 1998 print ad for Pinnacle Systems, a gray-haired hippie holding flowers stands in front of his bus, while a magazine ad for MicroSystems (1999) shows a similar flower-holding character and a toy hippie bus.¹⁸⁸ These advertisements indicate how, by the late nineties, the bus had shifted from being a living symbol of the counterculture to a symbolic, nostalgic one.

In the last decade, the Volkswagen corporation has decided to take advantage of the commercial potential of Americans' nostalgia for their vehicles, in both their marketing campaigns and their car designs. Having attained a comfortable distance from the embarrassing or disreputable elements of hippie culture, Volkswagen in the nineties felt able to channel

¹⁸⁷ See, for example, the bus on the back cover of Coupland's *Polaroids from the Dead*. Its back end is covered in stickers with slogans such as "Kill Your Television," "Poverty is Violence," "Think Peace," "Support Organic Farmers," and "Peace Through Music."

¹⁸⁸ See "Volkswagens in Film and Video," www.vwfilms.net for these and other examples of Volkswagen buses in popular culture. For further hyper-stylized "hippie bus" adaptations, refer to *That 70s Show*, *Zits* (cartoon), and *The Wonder Years*.

that legacy to target a youthful clientele of fashionable, prosperous, and consumption-friendly buyers. The corporation has succeeded in developing a sophisticated, youthfully hip image for their vehicles and in attracting comparable buyers. In 1998, Volkswagen resuscitated the enormously popular Beetle design with production of their New Beetle, which regurgitated the car's hippie roots in little details like a built-in flower holder. Advertising for the New Beetle included such catchphrases as "Less flower, more power" and "The engine's in the front, but its heart is in the same place."¹⁸⁹ Needless to say, the New Beetle is much more powerful, technologically sophisticated, and expensive than its forebear, raising serious questions about the degree of continuity between models.

Volkswagen has taken the next logical step in nostalgic car design by developing a prototype for a new Microbus, intended to capitalize upon widespread nostalgia for the original buses while creating its own following. The prototype plays on elements of past buses' design, with a distinctive bread-loaf shape, yet its costliness and luxury (like the entire current Volkswagen line) indelibly separates the new bus from its predecessors. In prototype designs, the new Microbus regurgitates the

¹⁸⁹ Volkswagen of America, 1998.

vehicle's legacy among surfers in particular, featuring surfing accessories like built-in surfboard racks.¹⁹⁰

When deliberately chosen and used for effect, whether in advertising, film, or literature, Volkswagen buses in popular culture almost always are portrayed as hippie buses, in highly stylized, derivative, and stereotyped form. This pattern comes as no surprise, of course, given that by nature the entertainment and advertising industries distill and exaggerate everyday reality, making their version of life more interesting than reality. In this case, these media are drawing from a commonly understood cultural reference point in hippie buses. In reality few buses looked as hippie-like as in the ads and shows, but these pop-culture appearances are important anyway as indicators of the aesthetic and spiritual core of hippie-bus culture, as viewed through the lenses of public memory and popular culture.

Over time, public memory inevitably condenses the inherent complexity of history into simple, distinctive ideas and images, and the more general the historical concepts in question, the simpler their expression. Within this reductionistic framework, the diversity of experiences and personal expression historically related to Volkswagen

¹⁹⁰ See www.vw.com and www.vwvortex.com for photographs of the prototype. See also "Volkswagen Microbus Concept," *Motor Trend*, July 2001: 54-60 and Christopher Jensen, "Microbus for the New Millenium," *Plain Dealer*, January 18, 2001.

buses is condensed under the cultural umbrella of hippie buses. This pattern of cultural reduction, where abstract movements are simplified into coherent, recognizable symbols and ideas, also holds true for the hippies themselves. Personal appearance became marked in stereotypical ways, as a character in Douglas Coupland's *Polaroids from the Dead* comments: "The aging holdouts are starting to look like cartoonified versions of themselves – Freak brother-esque beards and vests and denims; Mansonian love-god pantaloons with tattoos and rainbow-wear. 'Dead shows are like a theme park, Dad. GroovyWorld.'"¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Coupland, 47.

Conclusion: The Volkswagen Bus in a New Millennium

There is something [in owning a bus] that in a little way gives me joy. It's a delightful subculture, and I'll keep hanging out with these people, because they're a little wilder. Everyone else is fairly sober.

— Ran Moran, Volkswagen bus owner

It's 2001, but buses are still buses and they still have the same type of owners, and they're still good cheap cars that you can keep on the road for 20 or 30 years. So I guess that really hasn't changed, which is kind of cool, although, of course, Volkswagen the company has changed.

— Brent Christensen, Volkswagen bus owner

The split-window generation of VW Transporters lasted from 1949 to 1967. The bay-window design, characterized most distinctively by a single rounded windshield rather than two split halves, carried the Transporter name for a decade, until 1979. The Vanagon, a boxier version of the bus that first introduced a front-mounted, water-cooled engine, sold during the eighties, followed by the Eurovan from 1992 to today. Over time, as successive generations of buses grew more technologically sophisticated, more powerful, and more expensive, their ties to the VW bus cult grew weaker. Keith Seume writes of the Eurovan, “A thoroughly modern vehicle, it's a far cry in every respect from the [first-generation] Samba.”¹⁹² Among bus enthusiasts, “real” buses generally describe split-window buses and some bay-window designs, because newer models

¹⁹² Ibid., 75.

deviated from the characteristics that made buses originally distinctive, most importantly their air-cooled, underpowered, easy-to-maintain engines. Engines grew larger and more complicated during the seventies, to the point that homegrown mechanics were much less likely to work on their own vehicles. Earlier engines had been small enough to remove by hand, but later engines were heavier and less accessible.

Interestingly, as Volkswagen buses became more mechanically sophisticated and thus conventional, their popularity declined. Bus sales in this country peaked in 1969, with a record 65,000 sold that year; twenty years later, in 1989, Volkswagen sold a mere 5,000.¹⁹³ The decline was partly due to rising sticker prices and increasingly difficult maintenance, both by-products of larger and faster engines in newer models. In particular, Volkswagen began selling their Transporters with air-cooled engines in 1983, providing extra power but greatly adding to the cost and complexity of the vehicle. For that reason, some owners and aficionados claim Volkswagen betrayed its community – “sold out” – since bus culture was predicated on cheapness and self-reliance. The loss of mechanical distinction, combined with the growth of the American van and minivan market in response to the Volkswagen bus, significantly undercut the

¹⁹³ Spence, 87.

uniqueness of this vehicle during the seventies and eighties.¹⁹⁴ Vanagons and Eurovans are less popular, too, because the bus became a cultural icon during the flowering of hippie culture, in the sixties and seventies, eras coinciding with the split-window and bay-window buses. The Vanagon and Eurovan have failed to attain iconic status partly because they were marketed in less remarkable historical eras.

The VW bus cult today revolves around the enduring presence of split- and bay-windowed buses, which are generally regarded by enthusiasts as the only “authentic” buses due to their age. Unfortunately, the presence of old buses is slowly thinning in contemporary America. The largest number of older buses in this country is concentrated in Southern California, where a combination of good weather, heavy importation in the past, and a liberal cultural climate has sustained the culture. In that region, buses are numerous enough that some clubs and organizations limit themselves to split-window (pre-1968) buses, reflecting the superior status conveyed by their superior age. As previously mentioned, in Southern California organizations such as the Orange County Transporter

¹⁹⁴ The decline in sales of the bus also reflects wider problems with the Volkswagen brand during the seventies and eighties, when sales were hurt by poor and unremarkable designs that were forced to compete against Asian cars then entering the American market.

Organization sponsor yearly bus shows where hundreds of owners gather to exhibit rare or restored split-window buses for fellow enthusiasts.

Informal observation suggests that older Volkswagen buses are declining in number in America, particularly the split-windows, as one would expect of thirty- to fifty-year old vehicles. Buses are increasingly scarce in the North and on the East Coast, where they are more vulnerable to rust from precipitation and from the salt used to de-ice the roads. The rocker panels behind buses' front seats are particularly notorious for rusting through, and at some point the amount of maintenance and repair required to upkeep old buses exceeds the expertise, commitment, or financial ability of their owners. Throughout the country, buses fall victim to irreversible damage from vehicular accidents or fall into disrepair after their owners give up on them. Many buses, left to rot in fields and barns, are rusted beyond restoration, while others have been stripped for parts to salvage buses in better condition. Most buses from the early seventies and earlier have had their engines rebuilt or replaced two or three times. One Volkswagen bus website mourns the dying process with a list of photos named the "Hall of Shame," featuring grim photos of junked buses.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ See www.vintagebus.com.

However, all is not lost in the world of Volkswagen buses. A small but stubborn cohort continues to operate their old buses as “daily drivers” (in enthusiasts’ terminology). No epic road trips or acid trips for these owners, nor wild paint jobs; just practicality with perhaps some nostalgia on the side. Meanwhile, bus owners all over the country are actively working to restore decrepit old buses to working order or even pristine condition, for personal transportation or for display at Volkswagen shows. A modest market of aftermarket manufacturers has sprung up to address the demand for replica parts for old Volkswagens. West Coast Metric, Inc., for example, headquartered in greater Los Angeles, offers a 300-page catalog of restoration parts. In his introductory letter, the president writes that West Coast Metric manufactures two thirds of their merchandise (with the other third imported directly from the Volkswagen corporation in Germany).¹⁹⁶

Where ten years ago old buses were common and inexpensive, nowadays the onset of nostalgia and a preservationist sensibility has begun to increase their value. High-quality restorations of split-window buses can sell for over ten thousand dollars, though the repair work may cost several times that amount. Within the show-car circuit, the last five years has seen

¹⁹⁶ West Coast Metric, Inc., “*Restore it Right: Bug, Ghia, Thing, Bus, Vanagon, Type 3, New Beetle*” (Harbor City, CA: West Coast Metric, 2001).

a trend toward restoring VW buses to mint condition. Through the nineties, in contrast, many restoration jobs creatively adapted the bus to “low rider” or “California style” fashion, characterized by lowered chasses, tinted windows, and attention-getting paint jobs.¹⁹⁷ At the time, such adaptations were admired for reinterpreting the Volkswagen legacy, but in the contemporary nostalgic climate, such drastic modifications are considered blasphemously inauthentic. Within the elite circuit of collectors’ buses, the priorities have shifted from personal expression to authentic and pure originality.¹⁹⁸

In the context of authenticity, the status of buses in contemporary bus culture is judged by age, rarity, present condition, quality of restoration, and mileage. During a visit to Southern California for a bus show in February 2001, the most prestigious Volkswagen buses I saw included mint-condition versions of a 1954 camper, a 1951 passenger bus, and a 1950s ambulance. These buses belong to a private collector, Charlie Hamill, who keeps them garaged and covered in cloth in his backyard in Huntington Beach, California. His most impressive piece is a 1950s panel

¹⁹⁷ See Seume and Steinke, pp.90-97, for illustration of the low-rider trend.

¹⁹⁸ A racial dynamic may be at play in restoration styles, as well, since the low-rider look is most commonly associated, among restorations of all car models, with Chicano culture. Thus the “California look” deviates not only culturally, but also racially, from the German roots and hippie paradigm of Volkswagen buses.

van used to carry luggage from the pier to an ocean liner. The van boasts less than 500 original miles and contains original pieces of luggage inside, along with newspaper articles and other artifacts. This phenomenon of collecting buses reflects a trend away from casual ownership, since the heyday of hippies touring the country in decrepit buses is long past and the buses it depended on have passed their prime.

The public display of old Volkswagens at bus shows is a relatively new phenomenon, having arisen during the eighties. Buses had bottomed out in popularity during that decade, except among the devoted cadre of hippie bus owners invested in the touring lifestyle. Buses were less popular in the eighties in part because American manufacturers had reacted to the bus's popularity and entered the van market, giving the bus competition and robbing it of the distinctive status it held in the fifties and sixties, when station wagons ruled the road. Ralph Nader's public-interest group also effectively dampened Volkswagen's popularity beginning in the seventies by raising awareness of the cars' safety hazards, including the unprotected front seats in the Volkswagen bus.¹⁹⁹ This reduced demand for buses affected their cash value, as owners attest. The Thurmonds, who purchased

¹⁹⁹ See The Center for Auto Safety, *Small – on Safety: the designed-in dangers of the Volkswagen* (New York: Center for Auto Safety, 1971).

their bus in 1965, contemplated selling it in the early eighties, but realized “we wouldn’t have gotten more than \$1000 if we tried to sell it.” Greg Thompson, who owns two old buses, decided not to sell because no one would pay him more than \$600 for it.²⁰⁰

Public interest in Volkswagen buses has grown considerably in the last decade, however, as owners’ personal experiences attest. Beginning several years ago, Thompson says, people have been giving him unsolicited offers to buy his bus. “I get these little notes in the window, or under the windshield.” His bus has attracted much more attention recently, based on growing nostalgia:

Some time around ’92 or so, I’d park the car and sometimes people would ask me what year it was. Then I began to notice that people sometimes would not only ask me what year it was, but they’d ask me other questions about it. Then around ’94 people began to ask not only what year it was, and ask me questions about it, but they’d tell me stories about the VW they used to have. And I began to notice in ’96 or ’97 the stories began to include another part. They seemed to be concluded with the comment ‘and I wish I never sold it.’²⁰¹

The Thurmonds have had similar experiences. Bob Thurmond tells how

I’ll go over to Home Depot, come back out, and there’s somebody poking around, looking in the windows, and they’ll ask how many miles and say ‘I used to have one like

²⁰⁰ Interviews with Bob and Lynn Thurmond, and Greg Thompson.

²⁰¹ Interview with Greg Thompson.

this, about 20 years ago.’ We started getting asked to sell about ten years ago. Not much before that, but by that time it was a genuine antique, a classic, and obviously still in good condition. People would notice that, mostly old hippies or guys our age, asking, ‘You wouldn’t want to sell that, would you?’²⁰²

The growing nostalgia for Volkswagen buses has increased the sense of community among bus owners, as Thompson explains:

Around 1990 or so, I began to notice that when I’d drive along and I’d see somebody in a VW van, they’d wave to me, or they’d flash the victory sign. I didn’t do it at first; I thought, ‘Well, that’s their thing, their game.’ But after a while I began to think, ‘Well, that’s kind of neat,’ so I began to do it also.²⁰³

Volkswagen bus culture seems to have come full circle, because the practice of waving to other bus drivers, and the sense of solidarity among owners it manifests, was also evident in the first years of Volkswagens’ importation into this country.²⁰⁴

The owners’ community manifests in innumerable local and national clubs, including an Austin-based club for all Volkswagen owners, the Austin Air Coolers VW Gang. This group, started in 2001, boasts monthly gatherings, a website, and club merchandise for sale. On the first Thursday of every month, the group gathers at dusk in a parking lot where, after some time for socializing and inspecting one another’s vehicles, the group

²⁰² Interview with Bob and Lynn Thurmond.

²⁰³ Interview with Greg Thompson.

²⁰⁴ “The Car That Started it All,” *Small World*, Spring 1978, p.10.

parades by car through downtown Austin to celebrate the solidarity and numbers of VW owners. An Austin newcomer, Garrett Nick, started the club to make friends and to foster networking among local VW owners, as co-founder Brent Christensen explains:

He started it just to meet people, mainly. He was just new to town. Also he's a Volkswagen fanatic, so if you're into VWs, particularly buses, it's good to hook up with other people and just swap stories. You end up finding out a guy in town who recovers seats, or some guy who has a badass setup on the inside of their bus. You can learn a bunch.²⁰⁵

Air Coolers boasts more than 50 members, and in November 2001 they hosted their first annual Volkswagen car show and swap meet.²⁰⁶

A thriving Volkswagen bus community exists online as well, with hundreds of websites devoted to the buses, ranging from club sites to photo essays of personal restoration projects. Many web pages feature photos of rare buses, interesting bus accessories, and copies of bus-related literature such as old brochures, all provided simply for the education and appreciation of other enthusiasts. Planet VW and Vintage Bus, two of the largest sites, each feature tens of thousands of images, and include classified

²⁰⁵ Interview with Brent Christensen. A member of a VW club in Nebraska reiterates Christensen's point: "Because classic Volkswagen owners are working on vehicles close to or more than 30 years old, networking with other Volkswagen owners is often essential to gaining the help and parts needed for upkeeping the vehicles." John Fey, "Hubcap Being Taken for a Ride." *Omaha World-Herald*, July 14, 2001.

²⁰⁶ See www.aircoolers.org.

advertisements and online message boards among their various features. Vintage Bus also provides how-to guides for common restoration projects, an online registry for very old buses, and mailing lists for various subsets of bus owners. Planet VW also provides an extensive collection of photographs and literature, as well as listings of Volkswagen shows and a categorized directory of Volkswagen websites.²⁰⁷

* * *

So who owns buses nowadays, what kind of buses do they own, and what do they use them for? In my experience, contemporary bus owners fall into four categories. First, there are many middle-aged bus owners who have owned their buses since the sixties or seventies. These owners maintain their buses for everyday use, and though the buses may be rusting, they are generally in running condition even after several decades of operation. These owners generally have other vehicles, but they have kept their Volkswagens because they are cost-effective, personally familiar, and unique. Another type of bus owner is also middle-aged, yet owns the newer Vanagon or Eurovan models. Particularly with the modern Eurovans, such owners are motivated by brand nostalgia, and they may be wealthier than owners of older vans to afford the new models.

²⁰⁷ www.vintagebus.com and www.thesamba.com/vw

A third group of bus owners are young adults, college-aged or in their twenties, who have bought used buses for the same reasons that motivated earlier generations of young people, for a combination of practicality and style. These owners generally mirror their hippie predecessors, being liberal in politics and lifestyle, and they use the buses for similar purposes, namely traveling and living in them. The final category of bus owner has cropped up recently, consisting of bus collectors and restorers. These people are focused on the show circuit, and some even avoid driving their buses to better preserve them.

A surprising number of bus owners have owned their buses for several decades, and have kept them all these years. Some of these, like Bob and Lynn Thurmond, bought their bus new, while Greg Thompson, Ran Moran, and others bought theirs used many years ago. In any case, these owners have kept their buses because the vehicles have continued to prove useful and cost-effective. Thompson owns a panel van and Moran owns a pickup version; both men use their trucks for hauling loads of lumber, dirt, furniture, or other cargo. The Thurmonds have owned theirs for 36 years, using it mostly as a second vehicle during that time. Like all these owners, the couple never sold it because it has proved cheaper to preserve than replace.

Inevitably, with buses several decades old like these, the vehicles have weathered all varieties of breakdowns, accidents, and modifications. Among these owners mentioned above, each of their buses has had its engine rebuilt or replaced at least once. Of course, the quirks in these old vehicles add to their appeal, giving personality and character to already distinctive and well-loved transportation. Thompson's 1959 van lacks a gasoline gauge, for example, so he records his mileage in a notebook to avoid running out of gas. While by mainstream standards these buses are underpowered, unsafe, and unsophisticated, their owners appreciate the novelty and prestige of owning and driving such old cars.

Carla Steinbomer exemplifies the second type of bus owner, the Vanagon and Eurovan owners. An assistant to the Provost of the University of Texas at Austin, she is a "child of the sixties" who bought her 2001 Eurovan to express that nostalgia. She views her bus as a fitting reflection of her evolved position in life:

The Eurovan is what happened with [the baby boomers]: now we're working, more practical, more comfortable, middle-aged. The bus in the sixties represented the counterculture. Some of my friends had them, and I always wanted one, but they weren't safe, they were dangerous. It was you and a piece of tin, no seatbelts. The Eurovan has become what we have become – still hip, still different, with a little edge, a little character.

She appreciates the character and personality in her bus, explaining that American minivans of a similar type “don’t have the spirit, the hipness.”

Steinbomer appreciates the safety, speed, and roominess of her van, and she bought the Winnebago camper option to use on camping trips. She enjoys the Swiss-Army-knife aspect of the camper, where “Everything has its place. It’s like a traveling playhouse. Very well thought-out.

Everything compact, well-done.” Steinbomer explains that she enjoys cleaning and organizing the interior like a dollhouse. She participates in various Volkswagen owners’ newsgroups online for entertainment, and feels enough communion with bus owners that she waves at other bus owners on the road, regardless of the age of their buses. Though she realizes people with older buses might feel hers is a “yuppie bus” because it is new and cost almost \$40,000, she cares not and waves anyway.²⁰⁸

The third variety of contemporary bus owners are latter-day hippies who have chosen to own buses for some combination of practical and fashionable reasons. Brent Christensen, a 24-year-old former University of Texas student who now repairs BMWs as a mechanic, bought a 1977 VW bus to get around town and for trips to Mexico. He bought his bus for \$600 from a businessman who chose not to spend the money required to repair

²⁰⁸ Interview with Carla Steinbomer.

the motor. The owner of a VW repair shop in North Austin, Underground VW, connected the seller and buyer, taking a small finder's fee for the service. From his experience as a mechanic, Christensen appreciates the simplicity and sturdiness of his older Volkswagen, claiming that most new cars are too technologically complex and too flimsy to last. The bus, in comparison, is easier and cheaper to fix. "In a new car, if the engine dies on it, that's 5 or 10 thousand bucks. In a bus, whatever year it is, it's a thousand dollars" or so.

Christensen appreciates the roominess of his bus, which allows him to take groups of friends across the border for multi-week vacations. In Mexico, because Volkswagen buses are still common, parts are easy to find in case of breakdown. Also, because of the bus's humble image, Christensen feels he blends in among the relatively poor Mexicans better than Americans who drive nice cars.

There's more buses, and they understand too that it's a useful vehicle. It's cheap, you can cart around your entire family in it, and you can work on it if it does break down. That's the importance of driving a bus there, because not only are you not a rich American, but you're even closer to them because you understand too the importance of the vehicle.

He "Mexicanized" the bus by adding curtains and knick-knacks purchased south of the border. In keeping with the hippie-dropout lifestyle, Brent views Mexico as "paradise" and has considered moving there to farm the

land. He considers Mexico to be more tolerant and friendly than this country: “Awesome people, awesome countryside. Very friendly, community-oriented, not American, not just about ‘number one,’ more caring, more open-minded.”²⁰⁹

Other young bus owners are similarly tuned into VW bus culture and hippie culture, and appreciate their buses for manifesting these cultural traditions. Aurora, a high-school dropout raised by “beatnik” parents outside Austin, has been traveling the world for several years, since age eighteen. She makes money by selling handmade clothing and lives cheaply. She dropped out, she says, “Because I didn’t need the bullshit and programming and authoritarian attitudes of public schools.” She has driven and hitchhiked all over this country and Central America, stopping at Rainbow Gatherings (large-scale hippie festivals) along the way. More recently, she visited India and Thailand. She bought her bus in California while traveling, chosen mostly because of its practicality: “It sleeps four, it has a sink and kitchen, it has a whole pantry. The roof pops up [making a sleeping loft] from the front. It has a stove and icebox, a cabinet, storage space. Nothing is easy to work on, but the engine is easier to work on, it’s smaller.” Aurora also appreciates her bus because of its reputation within

²⁰⁹ Interview with Brent Christensen.

the hippie-traveler circuit. She states simply, “it’s the gypsy mobile.” She recently left her bus in her parents’ barn while she travels to Central and South America.²¹⁰

As young owners make clear, however, the cultural legacy of Volkswagen buses is a double-edged sword. Their cachet within the counterculture also makes issues of police targeting, stereotyping, and self-consciousness paramount. Young bus owners spoke of feeling insecure at times while driving their bus, particularly in more conservative rural areas, where buses are uncommon. They also claimed, like older bus owners in the seventies, that police target them simply for driving a bus. Brent Christensen explains that he is searched every time he crosses the American border from Mexico.

When we come back into Texas from a trip, and hit the border in a Volkswagen bus, that’s the scariest point ever, cause when those Texan guys see us.... Last time they said “Hey, Woodstock, right over there.” They made us park. Every time is a total unloading of the bus. They get a couple of dogs over there and search everybody.... They were Texan and we were the enemy, automatically. Never have I gone through there with any [drugs], and they never find anything, but it doesn’t matter. Every time I go through there I’m a drug-using smuggler for them. I think it’s just the bus. It could have been anybody, long hair or short hair.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Interview with Aurora. Austin, Texas, September 18, 2001.

²¹¹ Interview with Brent Christensen.

His experience echoes a similar VW bus episode at our country's northern border, as recounted in Paul Krassner's *Pot Stories For the Soul*. Kathleen Edwards explains in the book how "The Border Patrol on the U.S. side of the Canadian border took one look at the 1968 Volkswagen van with bicycles on top, California plates and a long-haired, bearded driver, and their eyes lit up." She and the driver were strip-searched and their van was thoroughly inspected, but the couple was released after proving clean.²¹² Christensen reports attracting attention among the general public as well as the police, saying that as a young bearded man in a VW bus, many people ask him to sell them drugs.

Young bus owners have developed strategies to protect themselves from stereotypes of bus owners as drug users. Hippie owners are keenly aware of these stereotypes and the police attention that accompanies that legacy. Both Christensen and Aurora smoke marijuana, but he does not carry illegal substances across the border and Aurora is careful to hide the drug while driving. Because she feels targeted as a hippie woman in a bus, and because she was once arrested for marijuana possession, Aurora has made a point to learn her legal rights regarding police search and seizure.

²¹² Paul Krassner, *Pot Stories for the Soul* (New York: www.hightimes.com, 1999), 142.

Alegra Bartzat, a University of Texas undergraduate whose father bought a bus for her as a surprise, feels self-conscious driving the bus, and confesses that sometimes she would prefer to blend in more. She resents that the vehicle makes her susceptible to stereotyping by others. She feels the hippie legacy of the bus places expectations upon her in the minds of others, which feels burdensome particularly because she has matured beyond her explicitly hippie phase of life. She explains, “I don’t want people to automatically think I’m a hippie. It makes me feel self-conscious some times.” For her own peace of mind, she reacted against her bus’s hippie image with a small gesture by beginning to shave her armpits again. Nonetheless, she recognizes that the car carries prestige among her peers because of its historical legacy. She recounts how “I’d been talking this car up to all my friends, saying ‘I got this sweet new ride. I’ve got to go show it off.’”²¹³

The community of collectors and restorers comprises a specialized subset of Volkswagen owners. These individuals, mostly men in their thirties and forties, have the time, motivation, and income to fund their hobby. Many of them have owned Volkswagens for many years, moving

²¹³ Interview with Alegra Bartzat. Austin, Texas, December 11, 2001. For more on young contemporary VW bus owners, see Donnie Snow, “Magic Bus Still Rolling Along.” *Tampa Tribune*. August 24, 1995.

from car to car as they restore one, sell it, and take on another project. Their efforts have helped considerably in keeping these vehicles on the road, but in doing so they have somewhat elevated buses and Beetles to the status of collectors' items. This increasing reverence, while perhaps inevitable as the vehicles become antique, contrasts sharply with the more matter-of-fact, eminently practical preservation of old buses among long-time owners. The growth of the collectors' crowd indicates a gradual trend toward "museumification" with the vehicles.

The era of the hippie buses, at least, and the counterculture that sustained them, may truly be coming to an end. Nostalgic media representations of hippies and their buses overshadow the real ones, as American culture sentimentalizes a cultural strain that we see fading away. Most original hippie buses are rusting in junkyards, and their owners have long since moved on in life. Particularly with the demise of the Grateful Dead and its touring culture, the whole hippie scene has declined. No wonder the bus in Volkswagen's "crying Jerry" ad, published following Jerry Garcia's death in 1995, was crying. While innumerable bands carry on the spirit of the Grateful Dead and continue to capitalize on that market, there was a real sense in 1995, in some circles, that the hippie counterculture, and thus the VW-bus touring culture, would soon perish.

Nevertheless, in liberal towns like Austin, Texas, old buses plastered with political bumper stickers and Grateful Dead stickers still prowling the streets, and they still appear in number at festivals and concerts for certain bands who preserve the hippie style.²¹⁴

Rather than mourning the buses' death, perhaps we should celebrate their rebirth with Volkswagen's possible Microbus design. The new wave of retrospective Volkswagens exemplifies David Brooks's key argument in *Bobos in Paradise*,²¹⁵ that contemporary culture has filtered the ethics of the sixties through the materialism of the eighties, producing uniquely contradictory products such as the New Beetle and Microbus. One may argue that the new Microbus, like the New Beetle and the "crying Jerry" ad, confirms that Volkswagen is cynically exploiting a countercultural identity that it abandoned long ago (dated to when the corporation stopped selling the Beetle in this country in 1978, or soon after when their buses became water-cooled, or otherwise). I prefer a somewhat more kindly approach, accepting that within the context of a profit-making imperative, the fact that the Volkswagen corporation acknowledges its colorful heritage – and

²¹⁴ Similar "jam bands," including Phish, Leftover Salmon, Moe, and String Cheese Incident have thrived in the last five years, and direct Dead spin-offs such as the Other Ones, Ratdog, Mickey Hart's solo projects, and countless cover bands have gotten considerable mileage from the counterculture as well.

²¹⁵ New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

indeed, celebrates it – should be appreciated. Our instinctual response is reflexively cynical, but less so if we dismiss the unreasonable assumption that cultural change is *bad*. Perhaps we can accept the newer models as indicative of and appropriate to the contemporary era, in the same way that the old buses were appropriate to the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Thomas Frank, author of *Conquest of Cool*, and many others would clearly disagree, preferring a more critical approach to consumerism and marketing, but for now, I am willing to give Volkswagen the benefit of the doubt.

Annotated Source List

Primary source material

Corporate materials

Volkswagen of America, *Small World* magazine. Published five times a year from 1963 to the mid-1980s. Contains reader-submitted travel articles, unusual VW-related stories, and how-to advice.

Volkswagen of America, *Weathervane* newsletter. William J. Murray, ed. Distributed to Volkswagen dealers in the sixties.

Volkswagen Writes History: A Chronicle of Facts and Pictures -- from the past to the present. N.p.: printed in Germany, 1996. An official VW history, focusing on milestones in the history of production.

In Our Time: Volkswagen Reborn. VHS. Volkswagen of America, Inc. Owner Communications, 1995.

Members of the Family: The Volkswagen Enthusiast Phenomenon. VHS. Volkswagen of America, Inc.

Volkswagen-centered nonfiction

Clymer, Floyd, *How to Drive a Volkswagen.* Los Angeles: Floyd Clymer, 1960. An advice manual.

Dalrymple, Marya, ed., *Is the Bug Dead?* New York: Stewart, Tabori, and Chang, 1982. A sampling of the Volkswagen bug advertising campaign, categorized by theme (ads focusing on mechanics, the size, the craftsmanship, etc.), written four years after Volkswagen ceased production of the Beetle in Germany.

Duncan, Dayton, *Out West: An American Odyssey.* New York: Viking, 1987. A travelogue about following the Lewis and Clark trail in a bus.

Falassi, Alessandro and Kligman, Gail. "Folk-Wagen: Folklore and the Volkswagen Ads" *New York Folklore*. 1976 2 (1/2): 79-86.

Glatzer, Robert, *The New Advertising; The Great Campaigns from Avis to Volkswagen*. New York: The Citadel Press, 1970. Includes a chapter on why Volkswagen advertising was so innovative.

Hopfinger, K.B., *The Volkswagen Story*. Cambridge, MA: R Bentley, 1971. A history of the Volkswagen corporation. The first half is a biography of Ferdinand Porsche, who developed the Beetle, and the second half concerns Hitler and Volkswagen during WWII. Does not mention the Transporter at all.

Keetman, Peter, *A Week at the Volkswagen Factory: Photographs from April 1953*. London: Dirk Nishen Publishing, 1987. A 70-page photo essay of the Wolfsburg Volkswagen factory, accompanied by short essays on Volkswagen and the photographer.

Muir, John, *How to Keep your Volkswagen Alive*. Santa Fe, NM: John Muir Publications, 1971. A repair manual that popularized the self-repair of VW buses.

Nelson, Walter Henry, *Small Wonder: The Amazing Story of the Volkswagen*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965. The classic corporate history. Begins in the pre-WWII years and continues through the late sixties, but focuses almost exclusively on the Beetle.

Post, Dan, *Volkswagen Nine Lives Later, 1930-1965*. Arcadia, CA: Motor-Era Books, c1966, 1982. With over 500 illustrations, this book ranks with *Small Wonder* as the best history of the Volkswagen.

Rowsome, Frank Jr. *Think Small: The Story of those Volkswagen Ads*. Brattleboro, VT: Stephen Greene Press, 1970. An excellent source of information on the famous 1960s advertising campaign.

The Center for Auto Safety, *Small – on Safety: the designed-in dangers of the Volkswagen*. New York: Center for Auto Safety, 1971. A critique of Volkswagen cars' safety flaws.

Van Halsema, Thea, *Safari for 7*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1967. Describes a family's travels around Europe in a bus.

Wilkes, John, *How to Buy a Used Volkswagen in Europe, Keep it Alive and Bring it Home!* Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1973. A how-to guide for young travelers.

Woodin, Ann, *A Circle in the Sun*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971. A travelogue about a family of six that visits the world's deserts in a Volkswagen bus.

Volkswagens in popular fiction

Addams, Charles et. al, *Think Small*. N.p., 1967. A book of cartoons and humorous anecdotes about the Volkswagen Beetle, enlisting the skills of a cross-section of famous illustrators and comics.

Buford, Gordon, *The Love Bug*. New York: Scholastic Books, 1969. The original story of Herbie the Love Bug.

Clark, William, *The Girl on the Volkswagen floor*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971. A mystery novel.

Johnson, Janice Kay, *Night and Day*. New York: Harlequin Books, 1987. A pulp romance about a hippie-type woman who falls in love with the bank vice-president while processing an auto loan to trade in her bug for a bus.

Kimbrough, Emily, *Pleasure by the Busload*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1961. A bus travelogue about bohemian friends traveling in Portugal.

Locklin, Gerald, *The Case of the Missing Blue Volkswagen*. Long Beach, CA: Applezaba Press, 1984.

Norman, Gurney, *Divine Right's Trip: A Novel of the Counterculture*. Frankfort, KY: Gnomon Press, c1971. A novel about a young hippie and his bus.

Partch, Virgil, [no title – book of cartoons]. N.p., n.d. A mid-sixties collection of humorous cartoons centered on the Volkswagen Beetle.

Poulin, Jacques, *Volkswagen Blues*. Translated by Sheila Fischman. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988. A French novel about a young man, his bus, and the girl he picks up hitchhiking.

Preston, Charles, *The Jokeswagen Book*. New York: Random House, 1966. A third collection of cartoons about Volkswagens.

Tabor, Doe, *Do Drums Beat There*. Norwich, VT: New Victoria, 2000. Set in the early 1970s, this novel describes a Native American girl who hitchhikes with a group of hippies in a VW bus to California, where she becomes a Red Power activist.

Wing, Helen, *Volksy the Little Yellow Bug*. Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1965. A children's story about the adventures of a cute and animate bug named Volksie, shipped from Germany to his loving owners in America.

Daly, Kathleen, *Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1975. Children's book about a Volkswagen bug.

Volkswagen buses in film

Alice's Restaurant. Dir. Arthur Penn. United Artists, 1969. Arlo Guthrie, the anti-war folk singer, stars as himself in a movie about communalism and antagonism to the authorities. Arlo drives a bus.

Celebration at Big Sur. Dir. Baird Byrant and Johanna Demetrakas. 20th Century Fox, 1971. A documentary of a folk festival that includes many VW buses.

Easy Rider. Dir. Dennis Hopper. Columbia, 1969. A classic counterculture film about two friends who journey East on motorcycles to complete a drug deal, and meet crazy characters along the way. They visit a commune with a bus on the property.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High. Dir. Amy Heckerling. Universal, 1982. A movie about high school in the 1970s, featuring a pot-smoking surfer dude who drives a bus.

Forrest Gump. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Paramount, 1994. An epic film which follows one character through several decades of American history, beginning in the fifties. A bus appears at Woodstock in the movie.

Friends Forever. No distribution, 2001. This “rockumentary” follows a noise-rock duo on a cross-country tour during which they stage performances out of a Volkswagen bus.

The Journey. Dir. Eric Saperston. Journey Productions, 1999. A coming-of-age documentary of a young man’s travels in a VW bus, starting on tour with the Grateful Dead.

The ‘60s. Dir. Mark Piznarski and Michael Piznarski. National Broadcasting Company (NBC), 1999. An NBC miniseries which tells the story of the sixties revolution in highly stereotypical form. Includes painted buses at Woodstock.

The End of the Road. Dir. Brent Meeske. Joint Production, 2000. Filmed on the final summer tour of the Grateful Dead. Features innumerable colorful Volkswagen buses.

Tie-Dyed: Rock n Roll’s Most Dedicated Fans. Dir. Andrew Behar. Isa Releasing Limited, 1995. A documentary about Deadheads, featuring innumerable VW buses.

Together. Dir. Lukas Moodysson. IFC Films, 2001. A narrative feature that studies the lives of a group of people involved with a commune in early-1970s Sweden. Residents own two Volkswagen buses.

Wild Thing. Dir. Max Reid. Paramount, 1987. A narrative feature about a young boy who lives in a VW bus with his parents until they are murdered.

Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace and Music. Dir. Michael Wadleigh. Warner Brothers, 1970. The original documentary of this classic music festival, featuring many buses.

Volkswagen buses in other media

Beagle, Peter and Michael Bry, *The California Feeling: A Personal View*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969. A coffee-table book about California, created by a journalist and photographer team surveying the state in a bus.

Beck, Julian, *Living in Volkswagen Buses and other songs of the Revolution*. Broken Moon Press, 1992. A collection of bad poetry mostly unrelated to buses.

Berkin, Carol, et al, *American Voices. A History of the United States*. Glenview, Il.: Harper Collins, 1982. This school textbook includes a photograph of a hippie bus in the Haight.

Cain, Chelsea, ed., *Wild Child: Girlhoods in the Counterculture*. Seattle: Seal Press, 1999. Includes references to buses and a photo with a bus in the background.

Cariou, Patrick, *Surfers*. New York: PowerHouse, 1997. Includes photos of VW buses at the beach.

Coupland, Douglas, *Polaroids from the Dead*. New York: Regan Books, 1996. References VW buses in the Deadhead scene.

Curry, Jack, *Woodstock: The Summer of Our Lives*. New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989. Includes photo documentation of buses at Woodstock.

Dylan, Bob. *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. Columbia, 08786, 1963. The album cover features a panel van in the background.

Hedgepeth, William, and Dennis Stock, *The Alternative: Communal Life in New America*. New York: Macmillan, 1970. Photographic and written references to hippie buses.

Holmquist, Anders, *The Free People*. New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1969. A photojournalist book about the hippie scene. Contains a photo of a bus at the Pacific Ocean.

Kesey, Ken, *The Further Inquiry*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1990.

Krassner, Paul, ed. *Pot Stories for the Soul*. Korea: hightimes.com. Several stories mention Volkswagen buses and their drug-using owners.

Landy, Elliott, producer, *Woodstock 1969: The First Festival: Three Days of Peace and Music*. Italy: Landyvision and Squarebooks, 1994. Photos of VW buses at the festival.

Mason, Lisa, *Summer of Love*. New York: Bantam Books, 1994. A novel about the Haight-Ashbury in 1967. Includes references to Volkswagen buses driven by hippies.

Miller, Donald, *Prayer and the Art of Volkswagen Maintenance*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2000.

Miller, Timothy, *The Hippies and American Values*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991. Includes a reproduced poster of the Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco, with a bus in the background.

Norberg, Sheldon, *Confessions of a Dope Dealer*. San Francisco: North Mountain Publishing, 1999. A hippie druggie's autobiography, with some reference to buses.

Partridge, William L., *The Hippie Ghetto: The Natural History of a Subculture*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973. Includes a photo of a hippie house with a bus parked out front.

Shelton, Gilbert, *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*. Auburn, CA: Rip Off Press, 1980. A comic series featuring hippies in a bus.

Shenk, David, and Steve Silberman, *Skeleton Key: A Dictionary for Deadheads*. New York: Doubleday, 1994. Includes some entries related to buses on the subject of touring.

Stella, Leslie, "Fat Bald Jeff." *Kirkus Reviews*, January 1, 2001. This book review includes a reference to a hippie bus owner.

Stevens, Jay, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*. New York: Grove Press, 1987. Mentions a VW bus owned by Allen Ginsburg.

Thompson, Dave, *Go Phish*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997. Mentions Volkswagen buses in conjunction with the Phish scene, a carry-on from the Deadhead subculture.

Von Hoffman, Nicholas, *We Are the People Our Parents Have Warned Us Against: A Close-up of the Whole Hippie Scene*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Crest, 1968. Mentions a Volkswagen bus.

West Coast Metric, Inc., "Restore it Right:" *Bug, Ghia, Thing, Bus, Vanagon, Type 3, New Beetle*. Harbor City, CA: West Coast Metric, 2001. A catalog of reproduction parts.

White, Roger, *Home on the Road: The Motor Home in America*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000. Discusses the Volkswagen bus.

Wolman, Baron, and John Burks, *Vans: A Book of Rolling Rooms*. Mill Valley, CA: Squarebooks, 1976. Mentions Volkswagen buses in comparison with American van conversions.

Woodard, Komozi, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999. Mentions a VW bus owned by Amiri Baraka.

Zipern, Elizabeth, *Cooking with the Dead: Recipes and Stories from Fans on the Road*. New York: St. Martin's Paperbacks, 1995. Includes many photos and references to VW buses.

Volkswagen-related media

Abbey, Edward, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975. A novel about sabotaging industrial equipment which inspired the radical environmental movement.

Duane, Daniel, *Caught It: A Surfer's Year on the California Coast*. New York: North Point Press, 1996. A personal narrative about surfing.

Edwards, Phil, *You Should Have Been Here an Hour Ago*. New York: Harper and Row, 1967. A personal narrative about surfing.

Fremont, George and Suzanne, *Why Trade It In?: The Car-Owner's Manual Detroit Will Not Provide*. Princeton, N.J. : Strait, c1976. A book encouraging owners to keep older vehicles.

Grant, Lindsey, *Elephants in the Volkswagen: Facing the Tough Questions about Our Overcrowded Country*. W. H. Freeman and Co., 1992. Unrelated to Volkswagens except by title.

Grushkin, Paul and Jonas, and Cynthia Bassett, *Grateful Dead: The Official Book of the Deadheads*. New York: Quill, 1983.

Kerouac, *On the Road*. New York: Viking Press, 1957. The classic novel of the sixties, with all the associations that travel and mobility conjure up about bohemianism.

———, *Dharma Bums*. New York: New American Library, 1959. Another classic bohemian novel.

Michaels, Lisa, *Split: A Counterculture Childhood*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998. A woman travels the country in a converted milk truck with her “liberated” mother.

Michener, James A., *The Drifters*. New York: Random House, 1971. An irritating hippie-exploitation novel written by an outsider of an older generation.

Muir, John, *The Velvet Monkey Wrench*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: John Muir Productions, 1973. An anti-technology manifesto from the man who wrote the most famous VW repair book.

Nicholson, Geoff, *Still Life with Volkswagens*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1995.

Pirsig, Robert, *Zen And the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. New York: Bantam Books, 1974. A philosophic view of motorcycle repair and travel that echoes the spiritual aspect of VW bus culture.

Rosenbaum, Jean, *Is Your Volkswagen a Sex Symbol?* New York: Bantam Books, 1972. Psychology book that uses bus and bug ownership as a lens for studying personalities.

Schumacher, E.F., *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973. A 1960s tract about the virtues of smallness.

Severson, John, *Great Surfing: Photos, Stories, Essays, Reminiscences, and Poems*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967. Includes essays on the spirituality of surfing that parallel bus culture.

Wright, Don. *Trailer Life's Guide to Full-Time RVing*. Agoura, Calif.: TL Enterprises, 1982.

Selected Newspaper and Magazine Articles on Volkswagens

“10 Revelations Per Minute,” *Automobile*, October 1994: 30.

“Bang for the Buck,” *Motor Trend*, August 1994: 8.

“Camping in a Volkswagen,” *Popular Mechanics*, July 1955.

- “Comeback in the West,” *Time*, February 19, 1954: 85.
- “Microbus in East Anglia,” *Autocar* magazine, April 29, 1960.
- “Volkswagen Kamper,” *Motor Trend*, October 1956.
- “Volkswagen EuroVan MV Weekender,” *Road and Track*, May 1994: 153.
- “Volkswagen EuroVan.” *Road and Track*, December 1992: 59.
- “Volkswagen Eurovan Camper,” *Car and Driver*, February 1995: 135.
- “Volkswagen Microbus Concept,” *Motor Trend*, July 2001: 54-60.
- “Volkswagen New Beetle – flower children, college students and baby boomers, unite!” *Road and Track*, 1998: 76 (10 pages)
- “Volkswagen plans to double magazine advertising to \$80 million in 1993 to launch five new models,” *Advertising Age*, November 2, 1992: 12.
- “The Beetle Does Float,” *Sports Illustrated*, August 19, 1963.
- “The VW Devon Caravette,” *Motor* magazine, November 19, 1958.
- Cauchon, Dennis, “Attack on Deadheads is no Hallucination.” *USA Today*, December 17, 1992: 11A.
- Church, Lisa, “One Man’s Junk: Volkswagen ‘Museum’ Irks Moab Neighbors,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Jan. 3, 2001.
- Clark, Blake, “The Car that Built a City,” *Reader’s Digest*, February 1954.
- Fey, John, “Hubcap Being Taken for a Ride,” *Omaha World-Herald*, July 14, 2001.
- Finn, Tom [pseud.], “Volkswagen Microbus: A Viewpoint,” *Car and Driver*, June 1970.

Fitzgerald, Kate, "Private Issue's Jerry Garcia Goes Truckin' With '59 VW Van," *Advertising Age*, October 27, 1997: 32.

Foege, Alec, "Funeral for a Friend," *Rolling Stone*, September 21, 1995.

Fracassini, Camillo, "Carry on Camping as Hippie Van Rolls Again," *Scotland On Sunday*, January 21, 2001: 9.

Futrell, Jonathan, "An A-Z of the Seaside," *The Observer*, July 6, 1997.

Greenburg, Dan, "Snobs' Guide to Status Cars," *Playboy*, July 1964.

Grumman, Cornelia, "Australian outpost of Nimbin gives dropouts, dopers a home," *The Dallas Morning News*, January 9, 2000.

Hansen, Liane, "Analysis: Listeners' letters," *Weekend Edition, Sunday (NPR)*, December 10, 2000.

Jensen, Christopher, "Microbus for the New Millenium," *Plain Dealer*, January 18, 2001.

Johnson, Tracy, "Alive with Deadheads," *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1998: F40.

Kiley, D., "Going Buggy: The rise, fall and comeback of Volkswagen in America makes a fascinating tale," *Brandweek*, 2001.

King, Marty and Granville, "Little Bugger," *PV4* magazine, August 1975.

Kisiel, Ralph, "VW bus is a drive down Memory Lane," *Automotive News*, Jan. 15, 2001: 20.

Krebs, Michelle, "For the Parking Lots of Paradise," *New York Times*, July 16, 1995.

Levy, Paul, "Fixing their Wagons," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, August 5, 1992: 1E.

———, “Is There Life after the Dead?” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, July 6, 1996.

Moose, Debbie, “Organic Farmers Try to Cut Costs, Boost Marketing,” *Times-Picayune*, July 18, 1993: B5.

Nicholson, Geoff, “The Unbearable Lightness of Volkswagen,” *Small Press*, Fall 1995: 42.

O’Donnell, Jayne, “Minivan’s Origin Rests with Volkswagen,” *USA Today*, February 13, 1995: 2E.

Owens, Howard, “Palm Latitudes,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1995.

Phillips, John, “Road Tests – Volkswagen Eurovan MV,” *Car and Driver*, August 2001: 79 (18 pages).

Railton, Arthur, “Will Success Spoil Volkswagen?” *Popular Mechanics*, February 1958.

Scarce, Rik, “Bumpy Roads, Cold Beer and the Formation of Earth First!” *Earth First! Journal*, November-December 2000: 9.

Simon, Scott, “Analysis: Listeners choose worst cars of all time,” *Weekend Edition - Saturday (NPR)*, April 8, 2000.

Snow, Donnie, “Magic Bus Still Rolling Along,” *Tampa Tribune*, August 24, 1995.

Spence, Steve, “The Van of Aquarius,” *Car and Driver*, March 01, 1992: 84-90.

Stockley, Tom, “From VWs to Wine, Vinter Does Things Right,” *Seattle Times*, May 29, 1996: F2.

Taras, Jeffrey, “A Magic Bus for a Weekend or for a long, strange trip,” *New York Times*, July 16, 1995: section 11 p.1.

Thomas, William, "Vintage Volkswagen bus has led a vagabond life," *The Dallas Morning News*, January 24, 1998.

Uhlenbrock, Tom, "Grateful Chesterfield," *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, July 2, 1995: 1B.

Vesey, Sunsannah, "Deadhead in the House?" *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, June 17, 1992: D2.

Welsh, Jonathan, "New for a VW people-mover: power," *Wall Street Journal*, August 3, 2001: W11C.

Volkswagen-bus related web pages

Official Volkswagen of America site

<http://www.vw.com/>

Includes pictures and specifications for the Microbus prototype.

Planet VW

<http://thesamba.com/vw/type2/>

The best overall website on Volkswagen buses. Features thousands of photographs, advertisements, brochures, artwork, etc.

Vintage Bus

<http://www.vintagebus.com/>

Another extensive directory of photos and memorabilia.

The Journey

<http://www.thejourneyfilm.com/>

Compliments the film of Eric Saperston's road trip in a Volkswagen bus.

Volkswagens in Film and Video

<http://vwfilms.net/>

An exhaustive directory of Volkswagen buses and bugs in popular culture, including feature films, documentaries, television shows, commercials, and songs.

The Vanagon and Eurovan Community

<http://www.vanagon.com/>
Includes a collection of VW ads from Life Magazine.

VW Vortex
<http://vwvortex.com/>
Describes the prototype VW bus remodel.

Austin Air Coolers VW Gang
<http://aircoolers.org>
Home page for the current local Austin VW club.

A Visual Journey: Photographs by Lisa Law, 1965-1971
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/lisalaw/>
Documents the presence of Volkswagen buses among Wavy Gravy's Hog Farm commune and in the Haight-Ashbury.

1969 Woodstock Festival and Concert
<http://woodstock69.com/>
Documents the presence of VW buses at this famous rock and folk concert.

Interviews with present or former bus owners

Aurora. Interviewed by author. Austin, Texas, September 18, 2001.

Bartzat, Alegra. Interviewed by author. Austin, Texas, December 11, 2001.

Christensen, Brent. Interviewed by author. Austin, Texas, September 16, 2001.

Colina, Chalo. Interviewed by author. Austin, Texas, December 12, 2000.

Quigley, Ian. Interviewed by author. Austin, Texas, October 12, 2001.

Moran, Ran. Interviewed by author. Austin, Texas, October 8, 2001.

Silkenson, Greg. Interviewed by author. Austin, Texas, September 17, 2001.

Steinbomer, Carla. Interviewed by author. Austin, Texas, October 31, 2001.

Thompson, Greg. Interviewed by author. Austin, Texas, September 12, 2001.

Thurmond, Bob and Lynn. Interviewed by author. Austin, Texas, September 25, 2001.

Woodland, David. Interviewed by author. Austin, Texas, October 10, 2001.

Secondary source material

Volkswagen histories

Baaske, Edwin, *Volkswagen Beetle: Portrait of a Legend*. Cambridge, MA: R Bentley, 1997.

Bobbitt, Malcolm, *VW Bus: Camper, Van, Bus, Pick-up, Wagon*. Dorchester, England: Veloce Publishing, 1997.

Clarke, R.M., *Volkswagen Bus-Camper-Van: 1954-1967*. Surrey, England: Brooklands Press, n.d. Reprinted auto magazine road tests of the split-window bus.

Ibid., *Volkswagen Bus-Camper-Van: 1968-1979*. Surrey, England: Brookland Books, 2000. Reprinted auto magazine road tests of the bay-window bus.

Ibid., *Volkswagen Bus-Camper-Van: 1979-1989*. Surrey, England: Brookland Books, n.d. Reprinted auto magazine road tests of the Vanagon.

Copping, Richard, *The Volkswagen Beetle: The Car of the 20th Century*. Dorchester, England: Veloce, 2001.

Flammang, James, *Volkswagens: Beetles, Buses, and Beyond*. Iola, WI: Krause Publications, 1996.

Fry, Robin, *The VW Beetle*. London: David & Charles, 1980.

Hodges, David, *The Volkswagen Beetle*. New York: Crescent Books, 1997.

Ludvigsen, Karl, *Battle for the Beetle: The Untold Story of the Post-War Battle for Adolf Hitler's Giant Volkswagen Factory and the Porsche-Designed Car that Became an Icon for Generations Around the Globe*. Cambridge, MA: R. Bentley, 2000.

- Meredith, Lawrence, *Volkswagen Transporter: the Complete Story*. Marlborough, England: Crowood Press, 1998. A pictorial history of the bus.
- , *VW Bus Custom Handbook*. Osceola, WI: MBI Publishing, 1994.
- , *VW Bus*. Gloucestershire, England: Sutton, 1999.
- McLeod, Kate, *Beetlemania: The Story of the Car that Captured the Hearts of Millions*. New York: Smithmark, 1999.
- Ouellette, Dan, *The Volkswagen Bug Book: A Celebration of Beetle Culture*. Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 1999.
- Robson, Graham, *Volkswagen Chronicle*. Lincolnwood, IL: Publications International, 1996. Contains a 20-page chapter entitled “A Van for the Uncommon Man.”
- Rosen, Michael, *My Bug: For Everyone Who Owned, Loved or Shared a VW Beetle*. New York: Artisan, 1999.
- Schofield, Miles, *The Complete Volkswagen Book*. Los Angeles: Petersen, 1971.
- Seume, Keith, *Volkswagen Cars and Trucks*. MBI Publishing, 2001.
- Seume, Keith, and Michael Steinke, *VW Bus: The First 50 Years 1949-1999*. Osceola, WI: MBI Publishing, 1999. A history and picture book on the bus.
- Shuler, Terry, *Volkswagen Then, Now, and Forever*. Indianapolis, IN: Beeman Jorgensen, 1996.
- , *Volkswagen KDF-Wagen: 1934-1945*. Indianapolis, IN: Beeman Jorgensen, 1999.
- Sparrow, Andrea and David Sparrow, *Volkswagen Bus: Camper, Van and Pick-up*. Dorchester, England: Veloce, 1997.

Wagner, Max, *Volkswagen: Cars people Love*. New York: Todtri, 1998.

Young, Daniel, *Advertising the Beetle, 1953-1978*. London: Yesteryear Books, 1993.

Zeichner, Walter, *VW Transporter/Bus, 1949-1967*. West Chester, PA: Schiffer, 1989. A picture and history book on the bus.

Thematically-Related Academic Work

Aldridge, John W., *In the Country of the Young*. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

Blumin, Stuart, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Brooks, David, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How they Got There*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Duncombe, Stephen, *Zines: Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. New York: Verso, 1997.

Flink, James J, *The Automobile Age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, c1988.

———, *The Car Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975.

Foster, Julian, and Durward Long, *Protest! Student Activism in America*. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1970.

Frank, Thomas, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c1997.

Frank, Thomas, and Matt Weiland, eds. *Commodify Your Dissent: The Business of Culture in the Gilded Age*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.

- Gitlin, Todd, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. New York: Bantam Books, 1987.
- Groene, Janet, and Gordon Groene, *Living Aboard Your RV*. Ragged Mountain Press, 1986.
- Hetherington, Kevin, *New Age Travelers: Vanloads of Uproarious Humanity*. London: Cassell, 2000.
- Howard, Gerald, ed., *The Sixties: Art, Politics, and the Media of Our Most Explosive Decade*. New York: Paragon, 1991.
- Levine, Lawrence, *Highbrow/ Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Levitt, Cyril, *Children of Privilege: Student Revolt in the Sixties*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin, *Rebellion in the University*. New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1971.
- Lipstiz, George. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c1990.
- Ibid., *A Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, c1994.
- Marchand, Roland. *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, 1985.
- Meikle, Jeffrey, *Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-1939*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979.
- McBride, David, "On the fault line of mass culture and counterculture: A social history of the hippie counterculture in 1960s Los Angeles." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998.
- McLuhan, Marshall, *The Mechanical Bride*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.

Niman, Michael, *People of the Rainbow: A Nomadic Utopia*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997.

Rehfish, Farnham, ed., *Gypsies, Tinkers and Other Travelers*. New York: Academic Press, 1975.

Rossinow, Doug, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Straus, Simon, *History of the Thrift Movement in America*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1920.

Sussman, Warren, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Partheon Books, c1984.
Essay on the Model T as a utilitarian car.

Thornburg, David, *Galloping Bungalows: The Rise and Demise of the American House Trailer*. Hamden, CT: The Shoe String Press, 1991.

Twitchell, James A., *Twenty Ads that Shook the World: The Century's Most Groundbreaking Advertising and How it Changed Us All*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2000. Includes a very good chapter suggesting how the sixties Volkswagen ad campaign reflected on the personality of the ad agency's lead man.

Wallis, Allan, *Wheel Estate: The Rise and Decline of Mobile Homes*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Williams, Raymond, *The Country in the City*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Williamson, Judith, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. London: Boyars, 1978.

———, *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture*. London: Boyars, 1986.

Vita

David Dyer Burnett was born in the Philippines on July 21, 1977, son of Barbara Feicht Burnett and Weston Dyer Burnett. David attended high school at The Head-Royce School in Oakland, CA, graduating in 1995. He enrolled at the University of Virginia that fall, graduating with degrees in History and Anthropology in 1999. After a year of outdoor jobs, he enrolled at The University of Texas in American Studies. In graduate school David has presented papers at the 2001 Department of American Studies (University of Texas) Graduate Student Conference, the 2001 University of Texas Women's Studies Student Gender Conference, and the 2001 Southwest American Studies Association Conference. In November he will present on Volkswagens at the 2002 American Studies Association Annual Meeting.

Permanent address: 2015 Powhatan St.
Falls Church, VA 22043

This thesis was typed by the author.