§ Libidinal Carism

The everyday life of petro-politics implies a certain relationship with libidinal forces, which could be expressed through the phrase, “libidinal carism.” People begin to worship their cars. This relationship is loving, fetishized, sexual and intimate. The becoming involved here importantly signifies a certain process of car-modification. One can fit enormous speakers to the back of the vehicle, use the back end of the car for pole dancing, or turn one’s van into a science fiction transportation device. The focus here is not to dismiss these consequences of “libidinal carism” as other than the “normal” relationship that one might want to develop between oneself and one’s car, but to understand that these behaviours may be studied and incorporated into the notion of everyday life that this letter is articulating with reference to immanent materialism. In this case, the rubric is that of ethology, or the study of social
organization from a biological perspective (see Gatens 1996). The whole panoply of petropolitics comes into view at this point, as the libidinal forces involved with “carism” carry with them immense social tendencies and the ways in which life is currently organised. For example, the connection between car advertising, town planning, and roads creates a landscape through which one is able to study current behaviours and forms of the pack. One is ‘turned on’ through car advertisement, usually with reference to sex, status, or freedom. This energy is henceforth packaged and managed through one’s use of the car in the town where one lives — for example, in the drive to work, going to school, or in the pursuit of leisure. Finally, this criss-crossing map and trace of one’s life may be seen from above in the density of the traffic and in the exact form of the roads upon which one travels everyday. The ethology of everyday life is therefore represented through the relationship between car advertising and roads, as well as the becomings and machinery involved with human-car modification.

The fictional novel that has come closest to an immanent materialism of everyday life and the petro-citizen is J.G. Ballard’s Crash (1973). David Cronenberg made Ballard’s hallucinogenic tale into a film (1996) — and the book and the film demonstrate many of the principles of libidinal carism. Ballard wrote:
I looked through the colour photographs in the magazines; in all of them the motor-car in one style or another figured as the centrepiece — pleasant images of young couples in group intercourse around an American convertible parked in a placid meadow; a middle-aged businessman naked with his secretary in the rear seat of his Mercedes; homosexuals undressing each other at a roadside picnic; teenagers in an orgy of motorised sex on a two-tier vehicle transporter, moving in and out of lashed-down cars; and throughout these pages the gleam of instrument panels and window louvres, the sheen on over-polished vinyl reflecting the soft belly of a stomach or a thigh, the forests of pubic hair that grew from every corner of these motor-car compartments. (Ballard 1973, 104)

Cars and humans are thoroughly entwined in this novel and film. Unfortunately, Cronenberg took the ideas in the book literally and represented the conflagration of humans and machines in a straightforward manner. The deployment of immanent materialism requires innovation and a more creatively innovative extension from the literal representation of ideas. The analysis of everyday life is well served by the novel as the libidinal intent is presented without emotion and in a non-
interpretive manner, as one can see from the passage from the novel *Crash* above. In Deleuze & Guattari’s (1984; 1988) terms, Cronenberg has ignored the tenets of the body without organs (BwO), and the practises necessary to create a work of art that successfully deals with desire in a non-representational fashion. The film version of *Crash* presents a highly stylised version of “libidinal carism” without the satire and irony required to make the ideas gel. Rather, the film wallows in pornography, and does not allow the material flows of sexualised action to circulate; the car crash therefore represents an analogy with orgasm in the film and not multi-dimensional lapsed time-images (see Deleuze 1989, 45) that additively combine cars, sex, desire, and death.

The film of *Crash* presents a moment of impact that is a direct transference from the flesh and sexuality of the body into the machine functioning of the car. This transference is compounded by the filmic choices made in the production of the film. In contrast, the book present multiple moments of impact, where flesh and machine communicate through sexuality in a multiple and complex manner. As such, libidinal carism transmutes and crosses over into everyday life, and may be understood as an important principle of the petro-citizen.