§ CAR CRASHES AND THE DEATH DRIVE

The construction of a plane of immanence with respect to the everyday life of traffic jams includes the reality of car crashes. The unconscious is activated at this point, as the chaos of non-determinate affect involved with a car crash seeps into consciousness. This thought production could manifest as a sudden panic attack whilst driving, or as a certain atmosphere of fear that one might discern as one enters a roundabout or in a car park. Andy Warhol’s *Pink Car Crash* (1963), one of a sequence of paintings in a “disaster” series, demonstrates the affect of fear as a suburban family clamber out of their upturned car. One can see a white picket fence behind the car crash, which adds to the affect in that the death drive has arrived in familiar suburbia. Everyday life is therefore connected to the death drive, and everyday life is also made other through this piece of art. *Pink Car Crash* has a visceral
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affect on the viewer in that the ways in which one may perceive are engaged and reversed. That could be you struggling to get out of your car after your next trip to the shops. After viewing this picture that thought could lodge itself in your mind every time that you get into your car. The death drive wells up in the mind through car crashes, and this drive is a crucial aspect in the construction of what we might call the traffic unconscious (see Deleuze 1997). The point here is not that immanent materialism consists only of focusing on death, or by revelling in the negative possibilities associated with car travel, but that the immanence of car crashes, as Pink Car demonstrates, communicates an overwhelming and absolute reality.

The everyday reality of car crashes is full of material that one may add to the traffic jam plane of immanence. The artists Ben Quilty and Tom McGrath have painted the wrecks of cars after head-on collisions. The wreckage of the car is abstracted from context — one doesn’t see anyone struggling to get out of the wreck, or where the car has been crashed. The car wreck is therefore a singular object, full of its own life, and not possessing a clear back narrative or framing story. The point here is that the unconscious, consumed by the death drive, doesn’t necessarily free-associate through the contemplation of images to fill in every possibility about their existence. Rather, the objects may take on their own lives, the car
wrecks are allowed to “become other” through immanent materialism. The application of *A Thousand Plateaus* to everyday life concentrates and focuses on the production of the new (see Deleuze and Guattari 1988), and gives rise to different realities that define material flows of objects and ideas. In the case of the images of car wrecks, these flows are an amalgam of twisted metal, halted desires, indentation, contortion, ruptures, and wounds. The affects that are extracted from the images of car wrecks include the becoming-dislocated of the car crash. The car crash is henceforth bestowed with agency that moves between notions of speed, progress, and death. The car crash defines a path to the wreckers’ yard; it is the place that we are heading to whenever we turn on the transmission. Death haunts the roads, it moves through our vehicles; death takes hold of the steering wheel . . . .