§ Global Car Crashes and Traffic Jams / China & the North Pacific Gyre

The plateau of the petro-citizen forms individuals and herds that consume and exist within the context of petro-politics, and this formation now extends around the globe (see Toscano 2010). One of the clearest consequences of this spread of the petro-citizen is the consumptive practices and growth of cars in China. The longest traffic jams in the world are now in Beijing. There are chthonic relationships between the ways in which the individuation of petro-politics forms citizens and the consumptive patterning and global consequences of these drives; and these should also be explored. One might say that the traffic jams in China represent a mode of organization that infiltrates the ways in which one might now conceive of freedom. The drives that one exhibits in order to consume and exist within
the context of petro-politics correspond to relationships that the drives inscribe around the globe. The point isn’t that the citizens of China want to merely copy the lifestyle choices of the West. The point is that petro-politics influences the choices of the Chinese as an unremitting drive that pushes them along to overtake the West. The consequences in terms of resource depletion and potential environmental disaster are clear. The internal conflicts that the choices of the emerging Chinese petro-citizens will produce and are producing are more convoluted. This is because the economies of the West and China are now integrated in one global capitalist system, so that the increases in wealth in China are intimately connected to the fortunes (and even misfortunes) of the West through global market economics. One could say that the traffic jams in China burrow through and emerge around the globe as stops and starts in apparently unrelated economic activity. One feels this connection in terms of freedom:

Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage! Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more freedom – and there is no longer any land. (Nietzsche 2001, 181)

Nietzsche expressed the workings of immanent materialism in terms of subjectivity and free-
dom. Currently, the internet may be used to communicate the ideas of immanent materialism simultaneously and concurrently around the globe. Chinese citizens can do research on American and European lifestyles and replicate these habits in their own terrain. This means that, for example, the notion of violent revolution and the overthrow of oppressive regimes can now happen through a combination of various electronically mediated and organised social media and acts of rebellion, which could ultimately threaten the continued predominance of the Chinese communist party: “[w]ithin this MySpace version of the electronic agora, cybernetic communism is mainstream and unexceptional. What had once been a revolutionary dream is now an enjoyable part of everyday life” (Barbrook 2007, 12). The introduction of the internet into the equations of the petro-citizen enables contradictory and unforeseen consequences in its construction. For example, a photograph of a traffic jam in Sao Paulo may be connected on the internet to an exhibition of suspended cars in Oslo, paintings of stylised car deaths in crashes in Los Angeles, and also to a representation of “libidinal carism” in Kiev. The plethora of meanings that one can extract from such multiple connectivities and the confluence of imagery gives rise to the creativity and artistic possibilities of immanent materialism. This is an affective movement, demonstrating mobile
innovations and a highly developed sense of conceptual construction. One is never able to fully relax, and think that immanent materialism has been completely realised, as immanent materialism does not represent a closed or ideal system. Rather, the forces and drives must be ceaselessly explored and developed in new works of (re)creation . . . .

In terms of traffic jams and car crashes, we cannot rest with the representation of cars, lines of traffic and their concomitant desires. The petro-politics and use of products that derive from the extraction of oil has created a vast array of artificial life that should be included in this analysis of everyday life. Much of this life now makes its way into the ocean
and becomes part of a vast array of objects that circulate in suspension. The North Pacific Gyre is a clockwise circulation of four prevailing ocean currents, and is in the process of collecting pelagic plastic, non-degradable chemical sludge, and other manmade debris in a huge oceanic suspension, convergent north of the Hawaiian archipelago. The Gyre concentrates an estimated 100 million tons of visible and invisible plastic waste, in what has been termed the “Great Pacific Garbage Patch.” Various estimates on the size of the patch range from as large as Texas to the continental United States. Although, “most plastics break down slowly through a combination of photo-degradation, oxidation and mechanical abrasion . . . thick plastic items persist for decades, even when subject to direct sunlight, and survive even longer when shielded from UV radiation under water or in sediments” (Ryan et al. 2009, 1999). When the plastics do break down, the vast majority simply disassembles into ever finer microscopic fragments and, eventually, in-assimilable molecular polymers. As such, the suspended, increasingly microscopic, waste builds up and is ingested by sea-life — birds, fish, zooplankton, plants, and other filter feeders. In recent studies, the microscopic suspension is measured to outweigh zooplankton by six times in relative mass (Ryan et al. 2000).
As such, the traffic jams and car crashes of human existence have translated into the seas. We are driving this process, and the global petro-political civilization does not relent from adding to this mass of plastics. Immanent materialism does not give us a solution to this picture of ecological Armageddon, yet it does enable an understanding of its formations. This understanding is penetrating; both in a rational sense of contemplating the scale of the problem, and in an unconscious sense of enabling creative work that can properly represent what is happening. One should appreciate the connection between everyday life and the most destructive production of pollution the world has ever known. The current situation requires radical and unheard of strategies and tactics to make the connection clear. I would like to suggest that the petro-citizen, immanent materialism, petro-politics, libidinal carism, and the international and time-based plateau into which the ideas of this letter fit, gives us a chance to communicate such a point.