

AUTOGEDDON

An excerpt from the epic poem by

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IN 1885 Karl Benz constructed the first automobile.

It had three wheels, like an invalid car,
And ran on alcohol, like many drivers.

Since then about seventeen million people have been killed by them
In an undeclared war;
And the whole of the rest of the world is in danger of being run over
Due to squabbles about their oil.

If an alien was to hover a few hundred yards above the planet
It could be forgiven for thinking
That cars were the dominant life-form,
And that human beings were a kind of ambulatory fuel cell:
Injected when the car wished to move off,
And ejected when they were spent.

NOT one huckstering copy-writer—
And they're only a sheet of Letraset away
From badlands ballyhoo merchants spiking sugar with silver-sand
Or dying sparrows yellow and selling them as canaries—
Ever sees fit to mention that the automobile,
Even that moving Pantheon, the Rolls,
Doubles your heart-beat on entry,
And transforms your psycho-galvanic skin response
To set the needles shivering on any lie detector.

From the moment you settle comfortably behind the wheel—
Your pelvis fondled by replica flesh panting with static—
It increases stress readings, poultices the ductless glands,
Slowly marinates the body of even the most 'experienced' driver with adreno-toxins,
Noisily generates a wide range of

cardio-vascular pressures,
As well as doubling up as a dinky orgone-accumulator stimulating trash sexuality.

Tides of blood and water in the body
Are magi-mixed, as if there was a permanent full moon.
The car is a portable mistral
Whipping up sumps of duff ions,
And moving them along in a packet of pre-storm tension.

*'Oh we had such an awful journey,
I feel completely drained.
Now what did you want to talk to us about?
My concentration's utterly shot.
Why did we come?*

FURTHER SPECIFICATIONS:

The machine re-vamps the energy patterns of the driver,
Bearing only a scanty relation to the work put into it:
*'Whoops, did we do something then?
Couldn't have. We'd have felt it.*

Like television,
The peculiar rhythm of the car
Sucks the brain-waves into an artificial resonance—
A managed and manageable attention span
The TV of travel.

Every car's vibration
Magnifies an all-pervading impregnation of information-free sound-porn,
A universal base line, whatever the tune,
Transforming the brains of its audience into double-glazed mulch,
Their attention span whittled down to the length of a passing car.
The infra-sound,
Exuded by compressors in 'air-conditioned' (and air conditioning) models
Will deal with those who shruggingly claim to be unaffected,
As their cerebral pre-capillaries silently pop,
And turn into varicose veins.

Look out of any city window:
Cars will slice through your thoughts
and take them away
For nothing.

Stand in any street
Bristling with painted piranhas
Playing the flatulent, whining muzak

of stress,
And be forced to absorb their every wilful manoeuvre—
A mass-produced multiple sword of Damocles
Inexhaustibly hovers over every action.
Streets that were open universities,
Are now the open sewers of the car-cult.

But, if all this proves too overwhelming,
You have permission
To take it out on anyone you wish—
Including yourself—
With a relaxing impunity . . .

The Visitor follows up the court reports:
Hit someone over the head with a chrome fender and kill them—
Life.
Take the precaution of attaching the chrome fender to a car,
Hit someone over the head with it,
and kill them—
Six months suspended. Licence briefly withheld.

'I'm going to democratise the automobile,' said Henry Ford,
*'And when I'm through everybody will be able to afford one,
And about everybody will have one . . .*

THIS is half-way house.
Half the world's paychecks are auto-related,
Half the world's resources are auto-devoted,
And half the world will be involved in an auto-accident
At some time during their life.

INTERCONNECTING roads, laid out like lattice-work,
Might sometimes strike a moderately subtle viewer
As a predatory web.

Skin-head architecture
Spawned by the dream of Autopia,
Edges in on no-man's land,
Like short-life gravestones.

From time to time,
On the outskirts of cities,
Wreckers' yards erect massive mausoleums of mouldering cars,
No longer worth requisitioning,
Picked fairly clean of their inhabitants,

Like Parsee Towers of Silence.

OIL.

From the Sanskrit root *-il*, light,
illumination,
And *petr*, Peter, the rock.

Thus, petrol is—remarkably—light
from the rock.

Oil,
Which, if the Chinese geomantics are
right,

And this earth is a living organism
(And the atmosphere is obviously its
own breath),

Could be its digestive juices,
Its cerebro-spinal fluid—
Or even its bile—

And it may one day over-react
To being caricatured as a handy
Molotov cocktail,

Needled with two million bore-holes
By oil spivs.

Oil,
The liquefied,
If not spiritualised,
Transmutation of extinct lives:
Primordial kelp, crustacea,
foraminifera,
Plankton, unicellular diatoms,
marine protozoa . . .
The haemins and lipids of dinosaurs
And unknown mammals from the
Jurassic—
Whose first extinction was clearly not
enough
For this consumer version of
ancestor worship.

Oil,
A secular sacrament
Whose price is regarded as essential
to keep as low as possible,
Perhaps to divert attention from its
true value,
And which, if the gurus of Exxon,
Texaco, BP and the 'Seven Sisters'
are correct
Is most properly exploited
When as many people as possible
Are incinerating as much of it as they
can
For as trivial a reason as they can
find,
To keep a continuous carousel of
consumer offal on the move—
In an alfresco gas chamber.

MORE than twice the number in the
death-camps,
A hundred and thirty times the kill at

Hiroshima,
Eight times the count in Korea,
Two hundred and thirty Vietnams,
Eight thousand five hundred
Ulsters . . .
The Hundred Years War in a week;
The Crusades in under thirty
seconds.
A Black Death with bubonic rats on
wheels,
A quarter of a million 'auto-fatalities'
a year—
The humdrum holocaust—
The fast-food—junk-death—road-
show.

Take any accident ward
Trying to service a few de-stocked
slices
From the 250,000 a year
Wheeled in on stiff-scoops
To brain and body garages
By whistling ambulance men.

Lines of metal beds on castors—
A medical parking lot.
Sinuous tangles of drip-feeds
Fuel those who blended too urgently
with vehicles
And make the room almost
indistinguishable
From a cross-section of an
automobile's wiring system.

Multiple pethidine booster shots to
jerk them into over-drive
Having turned their bodies into
cribbage-boards.
The unreported wounded, the
unreported dying
Vainly trying to kick their engines
over.
Screams of honking agony from rows
and rows of impatient, stacks of
meat.

An attendant mops up blood-slick in
the corridors twenty-four hours a
day
Watched by its donors
As they try to steer their minds back
into any available space
Where the 'accident' never happened.
Exile on Maim Street.

IN a riot, or a revolution,
It's curious that cars—
Anyone's cars—
Are always the first to go.

Traffic control is, for most people,
Their most intimate, and direct,
Experience of government—

As well as being one of its most
seminal justifications:
*'Look, you can't do without some
form of organisation,
I mean, take something basic like
roads . . .*

*You couldn't just have everyone
driving on whichever side of the
road they pleased.
Things would be chaos.'*

But a vandal,
If he/she ever risked losing pace
By politicising themselves
Might feel
That since no one voted for the car—
Rubbishing them requires no
referendum . . .
Besides which,
Slashing their tyres,
Pouring sugar into the tank,
Shoving potatoes up the exhaust—
So the wiring implodes and blows off
the manifold—
Sloshing brake-fluid onto the body-
work,
Topping up the oil with valve-
grinding paste,
Placing upturned plaster-nails under
stationary vehicles,
Turning cars over like wood-lice,
So that the petrol spills out onto the
road,

And they can be fired . . .
Might keep a few hunks of human
flesh
Throbbing with life for a little longer
Rome went mad with lead pollution.
It was Vandals who straightened
their pipes

But of course,
If you're conceived in a car as many
are.
If you first fucked in a car as many
have.
If you go to work in a car,
And if you derive most of your
pleasure, food and sustenance via
cars,
You're going to defend them to the
death.

