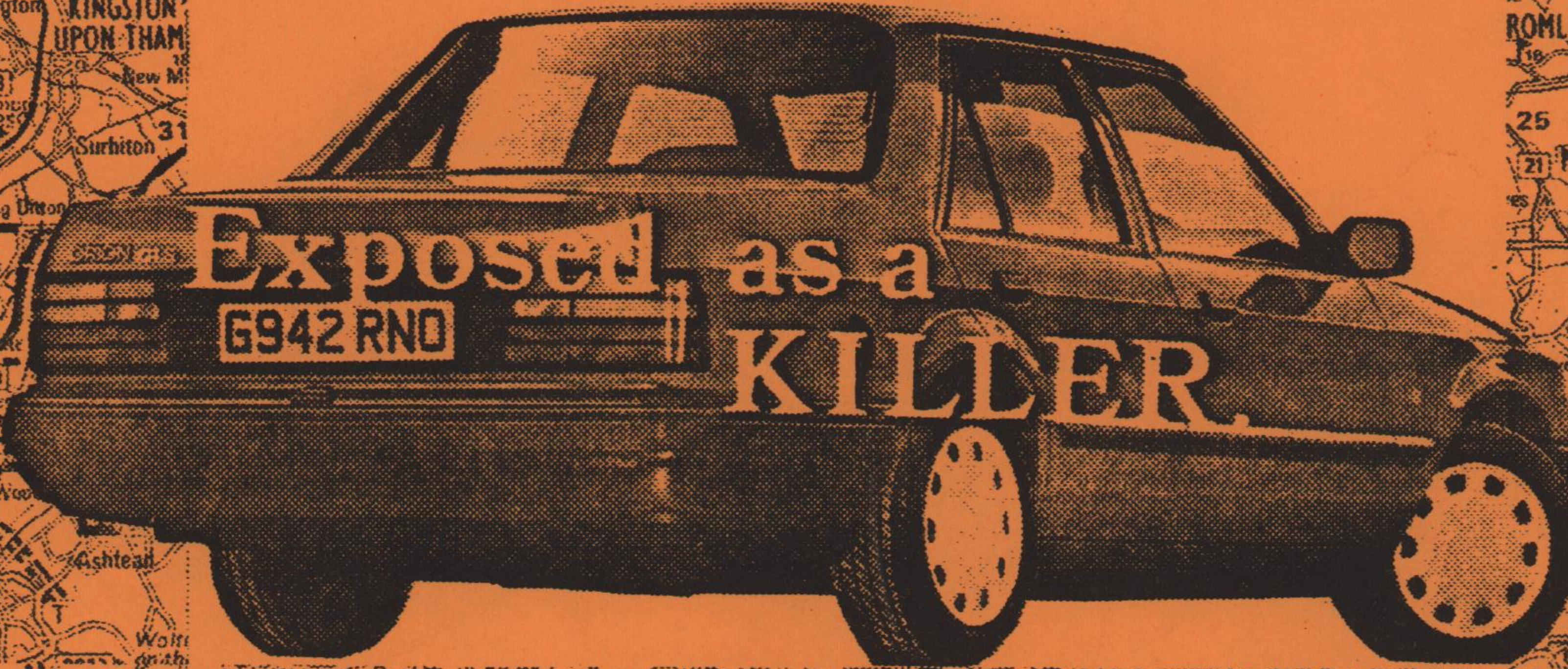


A Day in the Life of the Car

24
damning
facts



Introduction.

The dominant mode of transport for most people, certainly in the "west" and increasingly in the "third world" is now the private motor car. While people starve to death in Ethiopia while thousands upon thousands of people in this country have nowhere to live the economy goes to great lengths to provide for the needs of the motor car - production centres, roads, parking, fuel, repair centres, accessories, insurance etc., etc large numbers of people are paid large salaries to spend all or some of their working lives producing ideological material glorifying the motor car. Within the logic of late industrial capitalism it is blasphemous to question the central quasi-mystical status of the motor car. These days you are much more likely to earn funny looks by questioning the need for motor cars than you are by denying the existence of God.

"But I need the car to get around." "How else could all these people, get to where they're going." "But I like my car, it makes me feel good." "I must have a car because everyone else has." etc., etc.

Yes, but where are all these people going? We undoubtedly live in a transport obsessed society but what is it all for, why are all these people rushing around in cars? Let's try and make a list of what motor cars are used for.

1. Getting to and from work and other journeys connected with work.
2. Controlling the population and guarding private property (police and security firm vehicles).
3. Leisure - holidays, getting to and from entertainments, going on visits, drives in the country etc. etc.
4. Conspicuous consumption, status symbols for royals, politicians etc., etc.
5. Doing the shopping, taking the kids to and from school and other "domestic" tasks.

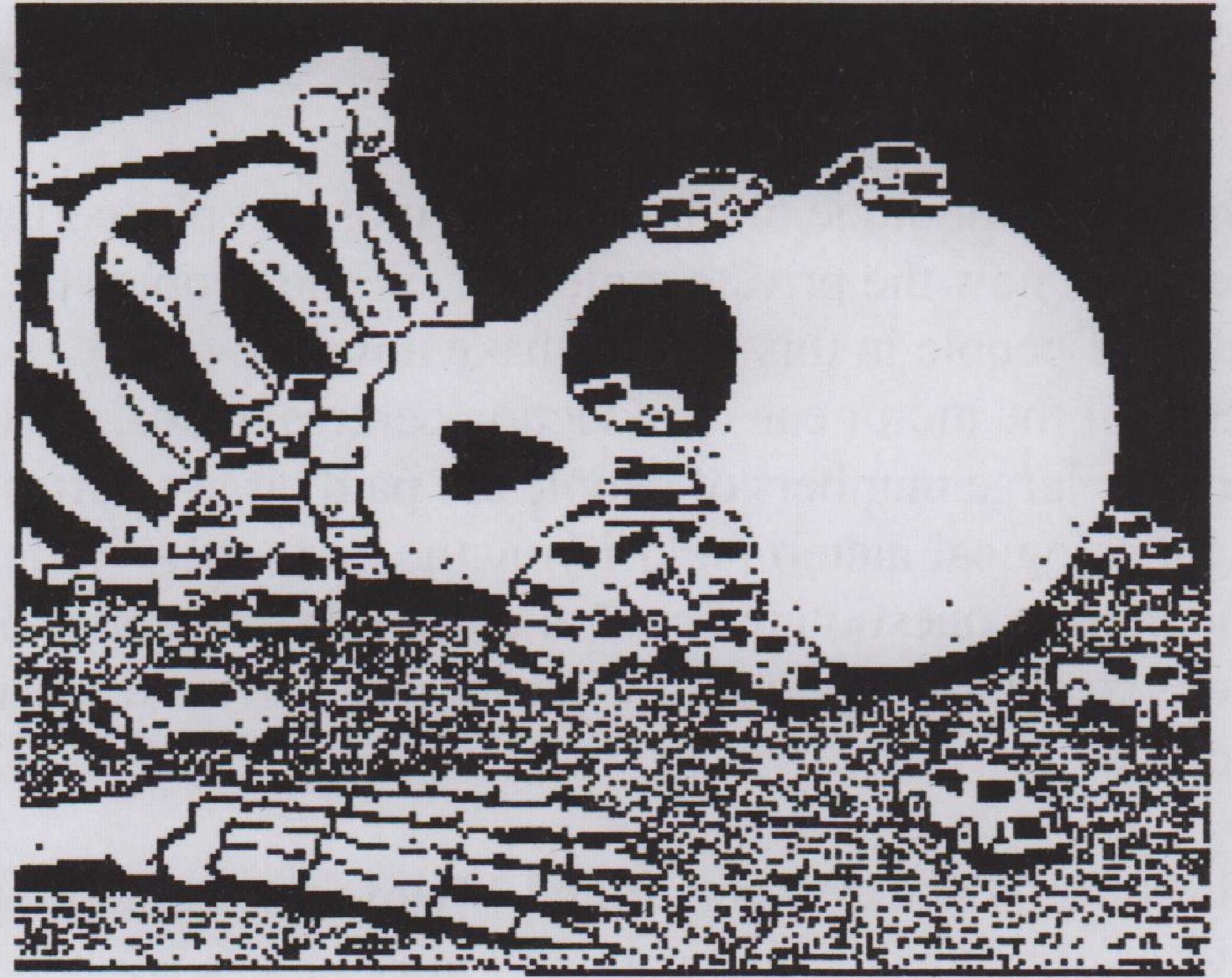
I think that about covers it doesn't it?

Now, if you really think about it for a while, I'm sure that you will come to agree with me that the small/private internal combustion driven vehicle as a piece of technology is not answering any real human needs at all but is simply an integral part of the mass, alienated, industrial, consumer society we inhabit. Without doubt the largest single use of the motor car is getting to and from work. Under late industrial capitalism most jobs are (in real human terms) either waste or actually detrimental to the quality of life on this planet. Therefore in many cases the "need" to travel to work could be dispensed with along with the job itself. But even if we go on to consider those people who are performing useful work why is it that work and home are so widely separated that a car is "needed" to travel between them? On a superficial level we could point to different wage levels and property prices/rents in different areas, shortages of either housing or specific kinds of work in certain areas and so forth as being amongst the causes. On a deeper level we could point to the tendency of capitalism to divide people's lives up into separate compartments (work, home, leisure, adventure, education etc., etc) all of which are separated by physical and psychological space. Either way the "need" for a car to travel to work in is a need of capital not humanity.

I think it goes without saying that the use of motor vehicles for military, police and security type functions serves the interests of capital and the ruling-class, is anti-human and that the entire repressive machinery should be dismantled as soon as we have the will and the strength to do so.

The argument for the use of the motor car for pleasure is slightly more problematical to answer but basically the arguments are similar to those relating to work; why are the places where people live and the places where they go to have fun geographically separate? Why is it necessary for people to

have two or three weeks holiday each year, to make up for the rest of their lives? Why do people feel the need to go on insulated, voyeuristic day-trips in the supposedly "natural" countryside? Why in fact do people derive "pleasure" from being encased in a dangerous, wasteful, polluting machine. The "need" to travel in motor cars for pleasurable purposes is almost wholly created by the structure, ideology and nightmarish nature of the society we inhabit.



As with military, police and security functions the use of private motor cars as status symbols by the rich and powerful is so clearly a part of the disgusting, hierarchical system we live under that it isn't worth talking about.

Last, but by no means least, we come to the use of cars to facilitate the performance of "domestic" and child-care tasks which are usually left to women in this society. It is perhaps one of the clearest exposures of the twisted and inhuman logic of capital that while some people (mostly men) are rewarded with wealth and status for taking part in activities which are of no use whatsoever, other people (mostly women) have to live hand to mouth and struggle to perform the vital work of raising children and looking after homes. There can be no doubt that under present circumstances a car can make life much easier for people in this position. But once again it is the system which has created these problems in the first place, by, for example, having large compulsory schools which many children are bound to have to travel some distance to, by making many people who are raising children and doing "domestic" work very poor, by making so much social space inhospitable to children, by concentrating food and other goods in special centres that people have to travel to in order to obtain the necessities of life etc., etc.

It is an irony typical of the situation in which we find ourselves that the people who would probably benefit most from access to a car are also the least likely to be able to afford it but under the present set-up that's just too bad. The motor car is at best just a private "solution" to a social problem. Of course it is in fact itself a big problem.

A Day in the Life of the Car

00.00 There are 400 million cars in the world (compare this to the less than 1,000 remaining Siberian Tigers, 660 of which are imprisoned in zoos) and each year they pump 560 million tons of carbon into the atmosphere (17% of total emissions) thus contributing significantly to global warming.

01.00 Renault have produced a car which averaged 124 miles to the gallon. They have no plans to market it.

02.00 The automated assembly line, probably the most alienating form of labour ever imposed upon the population, was first developed in order to produce motor cars. The first operational assembly line was constructed in 1913 at Michigan, U.S.A. and produced Model T Fords.

03.00 Detroit, headquarters of both Ford and General Motors, birthplace of the American car industry has the highest per capita murder rate of any city in the "West".

- 04.00 In the U.S.A. in 1984 nearly 3 billion gallons of petrol (4% of the country's annual consumption) was burned by cars standing in traffic jams.
- 05.00 Nearly one million people are killed in car crashes every year.
- 06.00 Between 1976 and 1985 the total number of miles driven in cars increased by 50%.
- 07.00 In 1985 motor vehicles burned 44% of all petroleum used in Western Europe so next time you see pictures on the TV of seabirds covered in oil and dying remember where the oil was going.
- 08.00 In America car tyre plants along Ohio's Cuyahoga river dumped so much waste into the river that it caught fire.
- 09.00 Cars produce 67% of the carbon monoxide in the atmosphere.
- 10.00 60% of people in Calcutta suffer from respiratory diseases caused by air pollution much of which comes out of car exhausts.
- 11.00 Taking into account roads, parking spaces at work, home, shopping centres etc., etc the average car uses 3 times the space of the average home.
- 12.00 200 million lbs. of plastics are used in cars each year. 2 lbs. of hazardous waste are produced for each LB of plastic. When cars are scrapped plastic is burned off releasing toxic substances, including Dioxin into the atmosphere.
- 13.00 Cars only use 10 - 20% of the potential energy in their fuel.
- 14.00 In Haiti only one person in 200 owns a car yet 33% of the country's import budget goes on petrol and car related equipment.
- 15.00 A standard 6 lane motorway can carry 83,000 cars a day, the equivalent of about 120,000 passengers. Every mile of motorway buries nearly 25 acres of land under concrete. A 2 track railway can carry 200,000 passengers on less than 17% of the area.
- 16.00 In the U.S.A. the car industry uses 20% of the country's steel and 63% of its rubber.
- 17.00 The cheapest car available in Brazil costs about what the average worker would earn in 6 years. A bike is equivalent to 6 weeks wages.
- 18.00 The mental strain of driving a car can cause neck pains, high blood pressure and ulcers.
- 19.00 Asphalt, the basic material used for making roads, is made from the toxic tar that remains from coal and oil processing, to this is added aggregate which often comes from incinerators and is laden with dangerous heavy metals like Cadmium and Mercury. These materials slowly leach their contents into surrounding land and water.
- 20.00 33% of all land in cities is dedicated to the car - roads, garages, parking etc.
- 21.00 Every year 100 million car batteries are dumped. Eventually their plastic casings crack and toxic lead and acids are released into the environment..
- 22.00 Car air-conditioners use about 13% of all C.F.C's (Chlorofluorocarbons) which destroy the ozone layer thus increasing the risk of skin cancer.
- 23.00 More than 100,000 new cars roll off the world's assembly lines each and every day.

Afterword



It can be argued that science is neutral, but technology certainly isn't. It is important to make a distinction between the two - science is the attempt to gain factual understanding of the nature of the universe, technology is the use to which any knowledge gained is put. An acquisitive, authoritarian system, such as we live under, will produce an acquisitive, authoritarian technology. The motor car is a cog in capital's machine - it is basically a tool for generating profit. The wrecked lives, the unfulfilled dreams, the destroyed nature which lie in its wake are of no concern to capital, they are waste products like the filth that pours out of car exhausts.

This work is not offered in an "environmentalist" spirit but in a revolutionary spirit - the system which has created the individual/private motor car along with so much else which is alienating, ugly, degrading and dangerous must be smashed once and for all. We must build a new society which does not seek to dominate the entire biosphere and which has human joy and fulfilment as its goal.

By attacking the motor car, I do not wish to suggest that people should not move around. On the contrary all the many restrictions which now exist on people's freedom of movement such as economic inequality, immigration laws, passport restrictions, anti-child social space, lack of facilities and access for disabled people etc., etc should be done away with along with the rest of the capitalist system. It is a natural thing for people to want to move around, to make new friends, to visit old friends, to go to new places, to learn about the world to find new things to do etc., etc. The point I hope I succeeded in making in the introduction was that most of the ceaseless movement we see around us today is people running around at capital's beck and call not people living for themselves.

A human society based upon respect for the rest of nature and the fulfilment of genuine needs and desires will produce a transport system suitable to its own values in the same way that capitalism has produced a transport system suitable to its own values. As part of a low-energy sustainable economy it is my view that such a transport system would be freely available to all and based upon walking, cycling, railways, small non-polluting *motor* vehicles (steam, electric) for occasional use, balloons/airships and sailing craft.



LOVE & SOLIDARITY

Steve

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