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David Cronenberg talks about his new film **'Crash'** based on J. G. Ballard's disturbing techno-sex novel. By Chris Rodley

CRASH

● They said it wouldn't be done. They said it couldn't be done. They said it *shouldn't* be done. But the inevitable has happened. In a slow-motion car-smash in the telepod of *The Fly*, director David Cronenberg and novelist J. G. Ballard have finally fused. The result emerged recently at Cannes: *Crash*, a movie destined to do for seatbelts what James Dean did for denim.

If Cronenberg's 1992 adaptation of William Burroughs' *The Naked Lunch* seemed overdue, his filming of Ballard's 1973 novel *Crash* looks and feels as if it was made long, long ago in a parallel universe. For one is forcibly struck by the overwhelming impression that this is *early* Cronenberg. Unblinking, undiluted, unrepentant and downright provocative.

For those unfamiliar with J. G. Ballard's white-hot, totally original book, it tells the story of James Ballard (James Spader) and his wife Catherine (Deborah Unger). Locked in a practice of compulsive sex with strangers, they compare notes, seeking any physical experience that makes sense in a bleak, passionless world of multi-lane freeways. Ballard becomes involved with Helen Remington (Holly Hunter), after he accidentally ploughs into her car, killing her husband. Their mutual crash-victim status brings them together, ultimately delivering them into the sump-oil-soaked world of the pathological Vaughan (Elias Koteas).

Renegade scientist and leader of a strange subterranean group, Vaughan is only able to achieve sexual release by crashing into people on the motorways surrounding Heathrow airport. His tattered leathers smell of stale semen. His cock only responds to twisted metal, beautifully formed chrome, shards of windscreen glass and blood on instrument panels. He photographs crash-sites and victims, and dreams of the ultimate orgasm: ramming into a Rolls Royce carrying Elizabeth Taylor.

In the film, his band of scarred and semi-mutilated crash victims (including Rosanna

James Spader as James Ballard in a car with his wife and the pathological Vaughan having sex behind him, left

Arquette) spend their time looking at videos of simulated accidents, fucking in cars, or attending Vaughan's own 'illegal' performances – such as his restaging of James Dean's 'Death by Porsche' (a brilliant Cronenberg addition). Ballard, his wife and Helen Remington are all drawn into Vaughan's crazed orbit, and his dream of a new conceptualised relationship of flesh and metal; man and machine.

The book was (and is) shocking, by any standards. Ballard proudly announced, in his introduction to the French edition, that it was "the first pornographic novel based on technology", in the days before the word 'pornography' began its own complicated shape-shifting process. Naming the novel's first-person hero after himself seemed calculated to shock the reader into confronting the book's hardcore fantasy/reality. The author was being totally honest about his own imaginative life.

Given the novel's scenario, in which humans realign their minds, bodies and sexuality to dominant technology, it was always perfect Cronenberg material. And it had echoes that might satisfy the director's personal interest in cars (he's an amateur racing driver).

Although the book is set in London, the cars are often American (Vaughan drives a '63 Lincoln, the car in which Kennedy was assassinated). It feels like the future, but is steeped in the present. Ballard's version of science fiction is all too now. The novel's dystopic vision seems as contemporary in the 90s as it did in the 70s.

The movie relocates the story to Cronenberg's home town of Toronto, that most archetypal of North American cities. The perfect quasi-sci-fi backdrop. Nowhere. No time. A brilliant solution to the novel's *sense* of America, and that country's very particular relationship to the car and its development.

Fiercely loyal to its spare, no-holds-barred script, it's structured around a number of sometimes perverse, sometimes joyless, sometimes verbally excoriating sex scenes. Characters pair off in various permutations. Not since actor Udo Kier fucked his own monster in *Andy* ►

◀ *Warhol's Flesh for Frankenstein* have audiences witnessed the erotic opportunities offered by an open wound: to Cronenberg, a neo-sex organ.

Crash obviously presented very particular problems for any financier. The \$9 million budget eventually came from Alliance, one of Canada's biggest producers of film and television. The French company UGC, who had a deal with producer Jeremy Thomas, got out of the kitchen. With the exception of *The Fly*, it has never been easy to find finance for a David Cronenberg film. It's rumoured that certain executives at Fine Line – the film's American distributor – regard the result as “morally reprehensible”. They won't be alone. *Crash* will be an NC17 in the States, with the added problem that Blockbuster Video – who control 25 per cent of the video market in North America – refuse to stock NC17 tapes. So there will have to be a special video version, which the director estimates will last about 40 minutes.

Of course, Cronenberg is no stranger to censorship, economic or otherwise, and with *Crash* looks to be preparing to come out fighting all over again. He's back, and the signal (perhaps a little faint lately) is again loud and clear: “I want to show the unshowable. Speak the unspeakable.” *Crash* is Cronenberg, Florida orange-juice style. No waste. No mercy. No way out.

Chris Rodley: Great books often make very bad films. Ballard's 'Crash' is so original and so complete a vision in itself that it must have seemed a daunting challenge.

David Cronenberg: It's also hermetically sealed. But there was something about it that I thought really *did* lend itself to being distilled and transformed into a film. You can only go on your instinct. When I finally started to write it, I was surprised just *how* directly it distilled. I thought I would be doing a lot more funny stuff, like inventing other characters, changing things structurally. But it distilled in a very *pure* way. And what was left was not only the essence of the book, but a living thing in its own right.

With 'The Naked Lunch', you said it was a matter of choosing exactly when to do a film adaptation. That you had to let it alone until you felt you could assert yourself over the material. Was that the case with 'Crash'?

I might have put the book away before I finished it, because I was afraid that I was going to want to make it into a movie. That was probably the gestation period: between when I didn't finish it and when I did. But then I didn't think about it for a couple of years. I think it needed that time to settle.

Have you managed to make 'Crash' the novel into a Cronenberg film?

Every day you're making a thousand decisions about what a film should be. It's hard to feel that it's *not* you. I think this is a lovely fusion of me and Ballard. We're so amazingly in synch. We completely understand what we're both doing. Right down to why he called the main character 'James Ballard'. There was never a question in my mind that I wouldn't call that character James Ballard. I knew why he did it. For some people it might seem strange. It is quite unusual. It might be unprecedented for an author to write a book like *Crash* and name the main character after himself. All of these things just seem so right to me.

You and Burroughs are very different as people, in that

Burroughs lived his books. Are you closer to Ballard? He has always distinguished between his imaginative life and his 'ordinary' daily existence.

I think that's true. Although I don't know if I could live in Shepperton! But even when you talk to Burroughs he'll say, “Look, I spend 70 per cent of my life sitting at a desk, so how adventurous is that?” And now he lives in Lawrence, Kansas. That makes Toronto seem adventure-some! But I do know what you mean. The Ballard character in *Crash* could just as easily have been called David Cronenberg, and it would have the same relationship to me as Ballard the character does to Ballard the writer.

The shooting script of 'Crash' is only 77 pages. Very short. Was that intentional?

Yes. I've been doing that for some time. It's part of what I think is my strength as a producer/director. It's a question of control. I shoot slow, with a lot of attention to detail. I'd rather focus microscopically on 77 pages. I like to have the script really pared down.

It's also an issue of budget. If I'd had a 120-page version of *Crash*, I couldn't have afforded the movie. My shooting schedule wouldn't have been any longer in terms of days, but it would have been almost half the time that I needed to do it right. I remember George Bernard Shaw saying that the length of a play is dictated by the capacity of the human bladder. You've got to get up and pee!

I like things to be taut and intense. To make a two-hour movie of *Crash* would be so draining people would hate me for it! If you're going to do *different* material on low budgets, that's a critical thing. Also, with a 77-page script I'm building a protection for myself and my actors. I can guarantee them that I have control, that I have final cut. That's part of directing actors. **It's a very hardcore script. When it was completed, were there any 'worried' reactions initially?**

My then agent at CAA, who I still like very much, said, “Do not do this movie. It will end your career.” When I said, “I really want to do this,” he said, “OK, then forget I said this. As a friend and business associate I felt I had to tell you.” I changed agents ultimately, and certainly that moment had something to do with it, because he really wanted me to do films like *The Juror* with Demi Moore. So I figured that we weren't talking about the same stuff. We'll see if *Crash* ends my career. I don't think so. I've never been in competition at Cannes before. That's definitely a good career thing!



Wounds and scars: James Spader (as Ballard) and Elias Koteas (as Vaughan), in 'Crash'

To get this script made, did it have to be low budget?

It was *always* going to be a low budget. There was no question. It was obvious from the word go that under \$10 million was really what we were talking about. The question then became how far under ten million.

After the big-budget location extravaganza of 'M. Butterfly', was 'Crash' intended as a back-to-basics Cronenberg movie?

Absolutely. That was very conscious. But it wasn't just the budget. It was also subject matter. My last three pictures have basically been studio pictures. Even *M. Butterfly*, despite the location shooting. Here we were shooting in Toronto locations with available light. There was no way we could afford to light three miles of road. It was very much like shooting *Scanners*. This means you have to absorb and incorporate what's there. It's much more like found art, and that's very exhilarating.

What's interesting is that this extended to the music as well. Since *Dead Ringers* my composer Howard Shore had gotten into the habit of going to London and recording with an 84-piece orchestra! We didn't have the budget, so he came to Toronto. He hasn't recorded in Toronto since *Videodrome*. So it would be: first day, do the whole movie with three harps; second day, do the whole movie with six electric guitars; third day, do the whole movie with two percussionists. Very much like we did on *Scanners* and *Videodrome*. We had many discussions about returning to the old style, except we felt we were a lot better at it! But the techniques and the parameters were like the old days.

Seeing 'Crash', I was immediately reminded of very early Cronenberg. 'Shivers' and 'Rabid' mainly. Like those two, it is uncompromising, very stark and very bleak.

I don't disagree. I was also thinking of the Darryl Revok character in *Scanners*. Vaughan in *Crash* does seem very much like my own creatures, who were emerging at the same time Ballard was writing his creatures.

There also seems to be a sci-fi link. Ballard's version of science fiction isn't dissimilar to the worlds of 'Videodrome', 'Scanners' or 'Shivers'. Is it or isn't it the future?

Yeah. The conceit that underlies some of what is maybe difficult or baffling about *Crash*, the sci-fi-ness, comes from Ballard anticipating a future pathological psychology. It's developing now, but he anticipates it being even more developed in the future. He then brings it back to the past – now – and applies it as though it exists completely formed. So I have these characters who are exhibiting a psychology of the future.

I think that'll be tricky for some people. If they try to apply the normal movie psychology to these characters, they're doomed to be confused, baffled and perhaps frustrated by *Crash*. Where are the sympathetic characters? Where is this recognisable domesticity that is then destroyed by Vaughan?

Some potential distributors said, “You should make them more normal at the beginning so that we can see where they go wrong.” In other words, it would be like a *Fatal Attraction* thing. Blissful couple, maybe a dog and a rabbit, maybe a kid. And then a car accident introduces them to these horrible people and they go wrong. I said “That isn't right, because there's something wrong with them right *now*. That's



why they're vulnerable to going even further". The novel is uncompromising in that way. Why shouldn't the movie be?

Ballard loves the film and says it is even more extreme than the book. Do you agree?

In the book you're in the head of the character James Ballard. There's that interior monologue thing that fiction does so beautifully, and which movies cannot do at all. Maybe that would give people more of a feeling of empathy for the character. But not much. When Ballard says that I go even further than the book, that delights me. I don't know how accurate it is though. I think it might just be a difference in the media. The immediacy of movie reality might do that on its own.

Hearing that Holly Hunter was to play Helen Remington, it sounded like radical casting. How did you decide on her?

I've had some people saying angrily, "I don't know what Holly Hunter was doing in this movie!" Outraged. But that's Holly. She wants to outrage those people. She was the first in! I hadn't even sent the script out. Her agent phoned me and said, "Holly wants to play Helen Remington." Holly is tough in ways her fans don't realise. She's not afraid. She had let me know as far back as *Dead Ringers* that she liked my movies and wanted to work with me. So you see an actor saying, "OK, so I've got some power now. I've got some fame and clout and what I want to do is work with these people who always seem to do things that I wish I was in."

We did have some discussions, but always with the understanding that she was already in.

This was a character she wanted to explore. You can imagine the kind of things that Holly must get offered. None of them would be like Helen Remington! So we talked about the function of the character in the script.

What about James Spader?

Well, I was really surprised that right away he wanted to do it, because he's done so many different kinds of movies it's hard to know. It was obvious he wasn't afraid to play unromantic or strange characters. But I didn't realise the depths to which he was willing to go in terms of exploring the *dark*. He really was an incredible collaborator and buddy once we started. He said that he was afraid of the script, as well as being intrigued, terrified and mystified by it. But he absolutely wanted to do it. So I thought, "He's my kind of guy." He *did* want to know who else was going to be in *Crash*, because he said, "After all I *do* fuck everybody in the movie." So I thought, "He's going to be fine." And by God he was more than fine.

How did he cope with doing certain scenes? He has to fuck a wound in Rosanna Arquette's crash-damaged leg!

In the character that Rosanna Arquette played, there's a definite humour involved. But people are pretty grossed out by that scene, I must say. But for me and for James it was just, "Well, it's in the book, and it's in the script." It made perfect sense and was integral to what's happening with those characters at that time. Being involved in a strange sexuality that is a mutation – not genetically but physically – through scars, car-crashes, and self-mutilation. It was

James Spader with Holly Hunter, as Helen Remington, with whom he becomes sexually involved after they crash cars

just a question of how to do the scene *effectively*. The way you would do a dialogue scene.

I did a little rehearsing with this movie because the actors requested it. As Holly put it, it's really a matter of comfort. Getting to know each other, given what everybody had to do. So we sat and talked and told stories, read scenes, discussed what were the nuances of the dialogue and how could we best make them work. **There's another very confrontational scene of anal sex between Deborah Unger and Spader. They're in bed, and Unger talks throughout their fucking about Vaughan and his car. How it must smell of stale semen etcetera.**

She's very verbal there because what's happening is that they're incorporating Vaughan into their sex life. So the way she talks – getting her husband aroused by talking about him having homosexual sex with Vaughan – means there are really *three* people in that scene. That is very close to how the scene is in the book.

That *was* a difficult scene to do, but in bizarre ways. You can't get hair to look the same when it's messy! You can't get pillows to scrunch up the same way! I had those agonies, as well as getting the scene to work. For the movement to be sexy, elegant but awkward. And finding the right tone. It's difficult for actors physically, when you're doing a lot of takes.

You did a lot of takes on that!?

Oh yeah. Several masters, and several of each close-up. We had to take breaks and stuff. ►

◀ One of the ways that I worked in this movie was to let the actors look at tapes of what they'd done. I've known directors who won't tape what they're shooting, or who deliberately use horrible black-and-white monitors so the actors won't look good. I had the *best* colour monitor I could possibly find, and I showed my actors whatever they wanted to see. It was a measure of trust. They could see exactly how they looked naked, how they looked talking, or where their ass was when their skirt was pulled up. If they were going to freak out and be upset then fuck it, they were going to freak out and be upset and we'd discuss it. I found it was well worth the time on the set in terms of just finessing what they were doing.

The sex in the movie is rarely face to face. It's usually rear-entry or anal. Why is that?

It's the choice I made. I liked the way it looked. It felt right, getting both the actors looking towards the camera and not at each other. It helped that sort of 'disconnected' thing. It's been suggested that I'm obsessed with asses, but I like everything, you know. I don't think I'm too overly obsessed with asses. It's more, "How do you have sex when you're not quite having sex with each other?" That kind of thing.

The movie also begins with three sex scenes in a row. Again, this seems very confrontational.

Yeah, it is. There are moments when audiences burst out laughing, either in disbelief or exasperation. They can't believe that they're going to have to look at *another* sex scene. To me that was replicating the tone of the book, which was absolutely unrelenting and confrontational. I thought that was one way I could replicate that.

In fact, rarely does a sex scene appear in isolation. They usually come in pairs!

And they all mean different things too. Each one leads to the other one. The first scene is of Deborah Unger with this anonymous guy in a airplane hangar. Then James Spader with an anonymous camera girl. They're parallel of course. And then James and Deborah come together, fuck, and compare notes. That's how they develop their sexuality. In one of my little test screenings someone said, "A series of sex scenes is not a plot." And I said, "Why not? Who says? It worked for Arthur Schnitzler." And the answer is that it *can* be, but not when the sex scenes are the normal kind of sex scenes: lyrical little interludes and then on with the real movie. Those can usually be cut out and not change the plot or characters one iota. In *Crash*, very often the sex scenes are *absolutely* the plot and the character development. You can't take them out. These are not twentieth-century sexual relationships or love relationships. These are something else. We're saying that a normal, upper-middleclass couple might have this as their norm in the not-so-distant future.

I was struck by the desire in the film to merge with metal and technology. It reminded me of ideas like the handgun in 'Videodrome'.

Yeah, yeah. A car is not the highest of high tech. But it *has* affected us and changed us more than anything else in the last hundred years. We *have* incorporated it. The weird privacy in public that it gives us. The sexual freedom – which in the 50s wasn't even subtle! I mean, the first guy who had a convertible in High School was the



Growing into metal: Rosanna Arquette drawn into the world of Vaughan and James Ballard in David Cronenberg's 'Crash'

guy who had the sex. He could take girls out to the country and do things to them. You'd have to take the fucking bus, and that's not the same. He had a mobile bedroom. That's exactly what it was, and that element hasn't changed. Maybe that's why people still refuse to take public transport! If they had little isolated sleepers in the subways, maybe it would work better.

So we have already incorporated the car into our understanding of time, space, distance and sexuality. To want to merge with it literally in a more physical way seems a good metaphor. There is a desire to fuse with techno-ness.

And yet in 'Crash' doing this seems to lead inevitably to death. The body is destroyed in this process of merging.

That's just an acknowledgment of the way it works with humans, which is more disguised than – let's say – with a salmon. After salmon spawn, they're so exhausted they die. Their sexuality and desire leads them to death. But there's a sense in which *Crash* – the book and the movie – are totally above death. They are about how much human control, and human will is going to be involved in that.

When Ballard claims the dead Vaughan's car at the end, it's as if he's claiming his body. The movie does seem to imply that after a fatal crash, a merging has taken place.

Yes. I still remember when Marilyn Monroe's body wasn't immediately claimed. As a kid I thought, "Well fuck, I'll claim her body. OK, she's dead, but she's still Marilyn Monroe." I thought, "Boy, that's very strange. This body that was the most desired body in the history of humankind, and no one will claim it." Taking the car in that scene is exactly like claiming Marilyn Monroe's body.

Is the movie tapping into current obsessions with body piercing and scarification?

Oh yeah. I've seen some very middleclass people with eyebrow rings and stuff like that. I think

they would be mortified if you said it was self-mutilation, or very primitive, or related to scarification but without the ritual tribal structures that justify it. It's a huge not-so-far underground culture. And tattooing. That's why I had a Lincoln steering-wheel shape tattooed on Vaughan's chest towards the end. That was my invention. But I'm sure someone somewhere has that – anticipating having a steering wheel buried in their chest in a crash.

Can you discuss your view on the characters' desire to explore the sexual excitement of the car-crash?

It's making very conscious what is already out there. It's not so farfetched. Apparently at one of the early LA screenings of *Crash* they were doing some focus-group thing and a guy came down waving his arm – which was in a cast – saying, "I've just been through the hell of a motorcycle accident and I broke my arm and there was nothing sexy about it. It was just hell and I think Cronenberg's gone psycho." I don't think too many people will take the movie on that level and maybe go out and do it. But one of the reasons this movie puts pressure on the unconscious is because this is something that has flitted through everyone's mind on one level or another at some time.

Ballard really touched on those aspects of writing about cars that can really arouse you. Surprise you. You find things arousing that you never thought could be; his descriptions of semen on steering wheels and instrument panels, and of how it got there. It was techno-sex. **Vaughan and his motley group reminded me very much of the low-life souls at the Cathode Ray Mission in 'Videodrome'. Or the scanners, who were derelicts.**

In most sci-fi movies it's usually the elite who are on the cutting edge of whatever's going on, but I think it's quite the contrary. It's going to be a grassroots-type movement. Those are the ones who are not fighting it, not analysing it, not organising it. They're just experiencing it. **The characters want to embrace the car-crash, a potentially life-threatening event, rather as characters approach disease in your earlier films. In the script, Vaughan actually says that we must see the crash as a "fertilising" event. Not a destructive one.**

Yeah. That is a line right out of Ballard. And yet it is so much my line about parasites being a good thing rather than a bad thing. Or viruses being a creative force rather than a destructive force, if seen from their perspective. Absolutely.

But it's also about the tension between reality and that whole idea of an idealised life. It's strange to me that we can conceive of a life that possibly no one has ever lived and say that that life is ideal: what we should aspire to and strive to attain. That's always seemed quite odd to me, even though fantasy often precedes reality. You need the fantasy to give shape to the reality you're trying to move towards.

In *Crash* I'm saying that if some harsh reality envelops you, rather than be crushed, destroyed or diminished by it, embrace it fully. Develop it and take it even further than it wanted to go itself. See if that's not a creative endeavour. If that is not positive.

And the more strange and grotesque the circumstances, the more interesting it becomes. It's also me picking up on some of the philosophical tone of Ballard; trying to figure out

EXT. MOTORWAY VERGE - NIGHT

As James pulls the Lincoln on to the verge, Vaughan runs back to the pedestrian bridge, darting in and out of the cars. James and Catherine get out of the car.

As James closes the door, he notices that the blood of one of the accident victims has somehow been splashed onto the door handle, and that some of it is now on his hand.

He finds a section of newspaper at the side of the road and wipes the blood off his hand. When he looks up, he realises that Catherine has followed Vaughan back to the accident site.

EXT. JAMMED MOTORWAY - NIGHT

James walks back alone, eventually spotting them amongst the throng of spectators, Catherine watching Vaughan's scarred face intently, provocatively, as he photographs every aspect of the accident.

There is a calmly festive and pervasive sexuality in the air amongst the onlookers, and even a congregational feeling as one group of engineers works on the crushed sports sedan, prying at the metal roof which has been flattened onto the heads of the occupants.

And now Vaughan poses an only slightly reluctant Catherine against the backdrop of the stricken taxi as though she were one of the shaken survivors of the accident.

When the roof of the sports sedan is levered up, the hair of the driver, its only passenger, comes off with it as though scalped, stuck to the roof-liner with drying blood. But it's soon apparent that it's not hair, but rather a cheap, tangled, platinum blonde wig.

Vaughan makes his way over to the sedan, intrigued by the dangling "scalp" which is almost phosphorescent in the road-rescue work lights. Catherine trails obediently behind him, like a harshly disciplined puppy.

When the body of the driver is exposed to the lights, the effect is doubly grotesque, for not only is the driver dead and partially crushed, but he is also a cross-dresser: Seagrave, in Jayne Mansfield drag. His long, greasy hair is tied up in a knot on his head, he is unshaven, his huge, fake bosom is bloody and askew, his bloated, muscular body strains against the pink 60s skirt and jacket, the blue suede boots with high heels.

There is also a dead Chihuahua bitch inside the car with Seagrave, which Vaughan manages to move with his foot until a cop, outraged, shoos him away. The dog is stiff with rigor mortis, obviously dead long before the crash.

An excited Vaughan has spotted James and now approaches him, breathless.

VAUGHAN

It's Seagrave. He was worried that we would never do Jayne Mansfield's crash, now that the police were cracking down. So he did it himself.

Vaughan turns back to look at the wreck again, almost reverent.

VAUGHAN

This is Seagrave's own solitary work of art.

(shakes his head)
The dog - God, the dog is brilliant, perfect. I wonder where he got it?

Now Vaughan turns to James, his face flushed, incandescent with joy.

VAUGHAN

Come with me, James. I have to document it.

Vaughan lopes off towards the Seagrave wreck.

once again my own little philosophy of life.

About the look of the movie. It's very stark. Simple. Very European in sense.

It feels that way to me, too. I like things to be deceptive in their simplicity. But sometimes the simplest things are the most difficult to do. The way I put the camera on the cars, for instance. The framing is not quite normal. I was thinking, "I'm not going to do the usual tricky stuff. I'm not going to use wide-angle lenses from above and underneath, because it's so distracting." And yet I *do* want to suggest people wrapped up in their cars: their relationship to their cars. So the framing is unusual but in a very simple way.

It's really a matter of exactly where you put the camera. Not that simple. Each day, after choreographing the first scene to be shot, that would be the first thing I would do. I put it more *outboard* of the car body so that the windshield pillar was halfway through the frame, and the other half is looking right down the car body.

That meant building rigs. You don't see that much because it takes a lot of time and it's hard to do. Shooting on a platform means you can dolly while the cars are moving. We had six Lincolns; one of them cut in half, one of them made into a pick-up truck so that I could dolly and put lights on from behind.

We got the roads department in Toronto excited about the movie. They closed a lot of things for us that they swore they would never close. Much to the dismay of some politician. We were going to get the Gardner Freeway

because they were working on it, but they finished it early. Politicians came out and said, "Due to the wonderful efficiency of your politicians, we now can open the road *this weekend*." So we said, "Sorry. You promised that we would have it that weekend." So they had to *keep* it closed. Embarrassing.

The car-crashes are unusual for 90s cinema in that they're very unspectacular. Why was that?

I wanted them to be fast, brutal and over before you knew it. There's not one foot of slow motion. No repeated shots. I wanted to make them realistic in a cinematic way, because it's the *aftermath* that is delicious: that can be savoured and apprehended by the senses. What happens during a crash itself is too fast to feel without slow-motion replay. Most of us don't get replays on our car-crashes.

Ballard says that 'Crash' is a cautionary tale from the eye of the hurricane. Do you think it's timely in that we're approaching the millennium, and this century has definitely been the century of the car?

Well, the place of the car in the world economy can't be overestimated. Although people don't think of cars as being very high-tech, every high-tech development is represented somewhere in a car. Whether it's fibre-optic electronics, or in the metallurgy. All of these incredible industries serve the car.

So if suddenly we said, "There can't be any more cars, we're stopping today," it would be the end of the world: economies diving, people not knowing what to do with themselves. Our attachment to it, as discussed in the movie, is

Cronenberg's script: at a crash where Seagrave, one of Vaughan's band, who restages famous car crashes, is a victim

very primitive indeed. It has become the quintessential human appendage. I think it won't go away easily. It's got a lot of shape-shifting to do before it disappears.

What surprised you most about making 'Crash'?

It has become a very *emotional* movie. In the beginning it wasn't, and certainly I would never have said that about the book. I find that people come away having been really shaken, feeling very emotional but not knowing why or how. It doesn't push any of the usual buttons. And that's really good. There's going to be a lot of different reactions. I do think we might get a lot of people throwing things. I'm prepared for that. But I don't really like being rejected. You know that. I really do want to make movies that everyone loves!

For your last movie you went to the Great Wall of China. Was there a sense with 'Crash' that you were - in more senses than one - coming home?

Definitely. And I took considerable strength from that. We literally shot the whole movie within half a mile of my house. I like that very much. I'd drive by all the locations every day on my way to the editing room. There's a wonderful sense of this movie being physically and tangibly a part of my life, a part of my daily, mundane life as well as my artistic life. That's very satisfying. Something that I haven't experienced quite that way for some time. It's good. *'Crash' premiered at the Cannes Film Festival*