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Narrative Speed in Contemporary Fiction

Many contemporary novels subject their readers to a breathless sense that the events are hurtling past too quickly for real understanding. Scenes and focal figures change rapidly, and helpful transitions are missing. The resultant feeling of excessive rapidity is what I mean by narrative speed. Why has speed become a commonplace in fiction? What effects do authors seek by using it? How does such a frantic pace affect audiences and their attitudes towards the texts? (Quite differently, one assumes, since some readers glory in the effect while others fight it or dislike the discomfort it causes them.) These questions confront readers of numerous recent novels, and they invite us to ask how one might best understand speed as a narrative technique. Narrative theory to date seems to offer relatively little insight into these problems. Critics have so far theorized pace (fast or slow) in just four basic fashions: (1) prose portrayal of physical speed; (2) narrative retardation; (3) the amount of story time covered per page; and (4) fictional reflections of cultural speed.

Critical concern with *portraying physical speed* focuses on the modernist fascination with physical speed and how to represent it in painting, sculpture, and writing. This is only marginally relevant to the kind of frantic narrative I am trying to analyze, because narrative speed does not necessarily increase as one describes physical speed, though the two sometimes coincide. DeQuincey's prose, for example, actually slows down as he attempts to catalog the sensations of fear provoked by a speeding mail coach. One significant connection between mechanical speed and prose speed has been helpfully analyzed by Stephen Kern. In exploring the speed-up mechanisms of the modernist era—bicycle, telegraph, telephone, car, and film—he notes that reporters wired stories to their newspapers. Kern attributes to this practice

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the paring away of unnecessary words, the 'telegraphic' style that gains recognition in the writing of Hemingway (Kern 115).[1]

A second way to theorize narrative pace—*retardation*—was propounded by Viktor Shklovsky. His approach was conditioned by his viewing folktales as growing from a kernel that could be rendered in a sentence or two. For them to become stories demanded ways of delaying. Likewise, many novels could be summarized in a paragraph. He focuses on techniques for slowing down, and gives no thought to speeding up. Hence, for him, stories always consist of a string of delaying devices. He analyzes retarding techniques such as defamiliarization,[2] repetitious structures, and the framing of tales within tales. Even characters can count as such techniques: Conan Doyle's Dr. Watson, he avers, exists "to retard the action" (104). Shklovsky's famous image of art slowing our automatic visual processing to make us see the stoniness of a stone puts retardation at the heart of his aesthetic.

Thanks to structuralist desire to make literary study a science, the third approach to speed tries to quantify the issue. Gérard Genette tried to describe narrative speed in numeric terms so that texts could be compared mathematically. He conceives of speed primarily as a ratio between the time span covered in the novel and the number of pages allotted to it, so that Proust's volumes contain passages that cover variously one minute of social action to a page all the way to one century to a page (*Narrative Discourse* 92). Genette's *Narrative Discourse Revisited* reuses this measure of speed and notes that *Eugénie Grandet* averages ninety days per page, while Proust averages five and a half days (34). Being able to derive a number this way is useful for the traditional fiction that concerns Genette, but it does not explain the contemporary phenomenon. Coover achieves the effect of uncomfortable and even upsetting speed in a three-hundred-plus page novel that covers roughly a dozen hours or very approximately two and a half minutes' action per page. *Gerald's Party* is very slow in Genette's terms, but not in readers' experience of that text.[3]

The fourth approach to speed almost passes as a given for many current texts. Critics simply postulate correlations between narrative speed and contemporary cultural speed. Speed notoriously characterizes our culture.[4] We acknowledge the multiplicity of images streaming ceaselessly by our eyes; we converse about the velocity with which technology changes basic ways of handling everyday life. The faster one's computer, the faster one's internet connection, the better. The sensation of speed is provided by many uppers in the recreational pharmacopeia: amphetamines (nicknamed speed) in the 60s, cocaine in the 70s, crack in the 80s, and meth in the 90s. Speed figures as an element in TV cartoons and MTV, in film editing, and in rap performance. Many novels have been said to embody such cultural acceleration, whether as neutral reflection, as Jamesonian hysterical exhilaration, as anxiety about such headlong movement, or as a prose equivalent to wheels spinning on ice, resulting in stasis. Most if not all of the texts I discuss do reflect cultural speed in some fashion, but I shall argue that reflecting it is not all that they do. Narrative speed has many uses, and one is to play with reader anxiety, deliberately provoking it in order to point to some greater cause for anxiety and stress.

So what, more precisely, is narrative speed? The effect I shall focus on is a sense of *the narrative being accelerated beyond some safe comprehension-limit.*

This phrasing makes plain that safety and comprehension are equivalent. The prose whizzes by us, and we suffer from the sense that it flashes along too rapidly for us to grasp the logic or keep track of what is happening. Reading slowly and carefully does not entirely free us from the sense that we are missing things through speed. Certain explanatory elements simply do not exist. While knowing the end will make a second reading feel less threatening, we are still unable to reduce such narratives to conventional logic.

To map the ways that speed is functioning, we need both to identify the main techniques that produce the effect and to study the evident authorial goals fostered by such narrative rapidity. In the first section, I will discuss three techniques for producing the effect of narrative speed: multiplying elements, subtracting expected material, and rendering actions fantastic. While the techniques are separable in theory, they almost never function alone, so the exemplary texts cannot be neatly divided into three groups. After technique, we can consider the kind of effect encouraged by the speed—satire, mystery, protest, exaltation, revolution. Despite their pacing, the novels discussed have relatively little in common: one might link William S. Burroughs's *Ticket that Exploded*, Mark Leyner's *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist*, and Darius James's *Negrophobia* for their drug-like rush, but the similarities are not profound. Po Bronson's *Bombardiers*, Robert Coover's *John's Wife*, Douglas Coupland's *Microserfs*, Ishmael Reed's *Terrible Twos* and *Terrible Threes*, and Fran Ross's *Oreo* will seem even more dissimilar. The closest to common ground is their targeting of some oppression or institution or system of order, social or mental.

Insofar as all these speeding texts result in attacks on some form of authority, the politics of narrative speed seems to be radical or at any rate rebellious, with the authors being the rebels. Insofar as the author is attacking us as readers, though, and deliberately inducing anxieties, we feel oppressed and are the ones trying to escape or dissipate the effect of the attack upon us. Paul Virilio shows that the various sorts of physical speed he analyzes can serve the purposes either of hegemonic powers or of revolution; revolution may be movement but can be met by police pursuit at higher speed.[5] Narrative speed similarly serves both escape and control functions—but with an interesting modification. The speed effect operates best during one's first reading, but loses its ability to bother us as much on subsequent readings. The politics of using narrative speed are thus relatively ephemeral. In addition to seeing how narrative speed is generated, we need also to look at its politics and their implications.

TECHNIQUES FOR GENERATING NARRATIVE SPEED

Multiplying the units—be they characters, plot elements, episodes, newsbytes, or events—creates the effect of narrative rapidity. We see this multiplying impulse in Ishmael Reed's *The Terrible Twos* and *The Terrible Threes*. Reed creates the effect of careening along by firing at us a plethora of names, topics, and temporarily focalizing characters. Sometimes each paragraph coalesces about a new character, and readers desperately wonder if this character is a one-off, or should be remembered as a key to what the plot might be. In the first few pages of *The Terrible Twos*, we get

weather problems in Greece, the American president wearing extravagantly priced clothes, Ebenezer Scrooge, three newspapers commenting on the president, Mrs. Charlotte Ford, and 7.8 million unemployed people, including four who freeze to death during inaugural week. Santa Claus appears in many guises from a Santa doll in Dolly Parton's cleavage to a Santa robot. We get members of Truth Tabernacle Church deciding that Christmas is the work of the devil, Percy Ross (the Jewish Santa Claus), Steven Jones (an assistant professor at Ohio State University), a poll that says 75 percent of American women are sexually dissatisfied, Professor James Deetz commenting on the food actually served at the original Thanksgiving, and the Thanksgiving day parade in New York, watched by two department store magnates, Herman and George Schneider. These items and considerably more tumble out in the space of five pages. Compare this complexity to a more traditional text: Cather's *Death Comes to the Archbishop* does not finish describing the leisurely supper and discussion among a few churchmen in five pages.

In an interview with John O'Brien, published in 1974, Reed says "I've watched television all my life, and I think my way of editing, the speed I bring to my books, the way the plot moves, is based upon some of the television shows and cartoons I've seen" (131). Reed's narrative structure works like channel surfing, which of course combines multiplication and subtraction. We get blips, scenes, and as we cycle through the channels, we can add to our knowledge of what is happening on any one of them, but we lose the connected form of the various narratives. His is a many-channel system, so anxiety accrues simply through our fear that we will forget something useful or important. We ignore TV shows of no interest, but if we are traditional readers, we are less cavalier with novelistic story lines, and continue to assume usefulness as a criterion for material in a novel. We are pushed into feeling that we are not in control, that we cannot organize the chaos. In the long run, Reed brings the many threads of story more or less together, but even that plot, such as it is, offers no real-world consistency. One character in *The Terrible Twos* goes from being a blackmailing broadcast executive to a born again follower of a corrupt evangelist; in *The Terrible Threes*, that same person turns out to be an extraterrestrial whose orders were to encourage nuclear war to fumigate Earth for the extraterrestrials, but who has fallen in love with humans instead of carrying out his mission. One can relax and enjoy this, but at the price of giving up expectations and foregoing the rewards of expectations gratified. Even surprise depends upon our having expectations to be frustrated.

Slowing down the narrative naturally focuses our attention. The central scenes in *The Terrible Twos* use Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" as its 'classical myth' and retells Scrooge's visions of other Christmases as various presidents, vice presidents, and other ghostly figures of power who lament the places where they had a chance to improve the world but instead chose wrongly and spread long-lasting evil. Truman reviews his decision to drop the bomb; Ike, his to have Lumumba assassinated; Nelson Rockefeller, his preferring to ball his girlfriend rather than answer the phone when Attica prisoners rioted, which resulted in carnage. Such self-contained visions, detailed in part because they need to persuade us of personal anguish and regret, make the general speediness all the more noticeable by contrast.

Robert Coover's novel *John's Wife* uses all three techniques, but rather ostentatiously attacks us with multiplication at the outset. Coover so multiplies the number of characters we have to keep straight that we struggle mightily to retain detail about any individual. John, Floyd, Gordon, Ellsworth, Otis, Kevin, Nerd, Rex, Pastor Lenny, Fish and Turtle (two teens), Alf, Trevor, Waldo, Stu, Mitch, Barnaby, Maynard, Snuffy, Dutch, Oxford and his three sons (Harvard, Yale, and Cornell), Bruce, Daddy Duwayne, and Mikey turn up in the first eighteen or so pages, and those are just the men and boys. The women are equally numerous: Floyd's wife Edna, Gordon's senile mother, Waldo's wife Lorraine, Gordon's wife Pauline, Trevor's wife Marge, Lenny's wife Beatrice, Maynard's wife Veronica, Columbia (daughter of Oxford), Cornell's wife Gretchen, Kate the town Librarian (and Oxford's wife), John's daughter Clarissa, Marie-Claire, Opal (mother of John and wife of Mitch), Stu's wife Daphne, Barnaby's wife Audrey, Jennifer, Harriet, and Nevada, to name the main ones. And of course, we also have John's wife: never given a name, often invisible but felt throughout the community, sexually coveted by the men in their various fashions, known and mostly liked by all the women. Given that I may have missed a few, call it fifty characters that we must keep straight. The most remarkable thing is that for the most part we can if we try; we stumble and say "is she the one suffering from clairaudience or the one haunted by the abortion?" but we usually figure it out, though the fact that we are always struggling makes us feel that they come on too fast and too many.

The technique of multiplication shows up in how Coover handles his topics. One woman wonders "Why couldn't life be spread out like memory was, with past and present all interwoven and dissolving into one another, so you could drift from story to story whenever the mood struck" (352), and something like that is Coover's *modus construendi*. He creates swirls. Some topic—it might be love—will be set up, and most of the characters will in one fashion or another be presented in ways that show their concept of love—that it exists or doesn't, that it is dangerous or silly. We see how they lose their virginity—most of the women of his generation lose it to John, the fairy-tale "hero" ("Once, there was a man named John. John had money, family, power, good health, high regard, many friends" [7]). Coover swirls back and forth over topics, giving us cross-sectional pictures of this town. Memory gives us John's generation in high school, in college as frat rats and sorority sisters, buoyant with youth if nothing else; we also then see them later as lushes and hags and semi-failures, as voyeurs and parents and town council members, as wheelers and dealers and backstabbers.

We see multiplication creating a different effect in Po Bronson's *Bombardiers*. This novel is set in the financial world where the characters mostly sell junk bonds and mortgages. The sellers are all given unreasonable quotas: sell twenty million, sell fifty million dollars worth of some very scummy financial instruments, often to Savings and Loans already in trouble, on the theory that the government will bail them out. The salesmen in *Bombardiers* despise their products, which makes their lives and tensions worse. Sid Geeder, the focal figure, *hates* selling what he knows to be worthless, but he manages to meet the totally unreasonable quotas thanks to his need to be known as the "mortgage king" of the office. His ingenious double talk

is eagerly stolen by his office mates and adapted to boost their sales. Sid holds himself together with the thought that he can cash out of his company shares in a few more months, despite the evidence that people are frequently fired just before they can cash out, no matter how good they may be, and despite the evidence that he might well be fired for failing to make a quota, no matter how insanely high that had been set. He cannot win, but refuses to see that. Instead, he leads his life at the hectic pace suggested by the snippets of phone calls and sales pitches that bombard us.

"It was a filthy profession, but the money was addicting, and one addiction led to another, and they were all going to hell" (3). This same line begins the last chapter, except that the later phrasing is "they had all gone to hell" (304). The addictive nature of the behavior is clear, and will tie in with other drug-rush narrative speeds. One of the sellers actually does do drugs, using a different drug each day so he does not become addicted to any particular one. Others can be addicted to the reputation of being a tough woman in a man's world, or the reputation of meeting higher quotas than anyone else in the company, or so addicted to coffee as nearly to die of caffeine poisoning. When they break down or burn out, the symptoms vary: one develops a walleye that won't focus, another develops "itching" teeth, one stutters when he tries to say any number, though non-numbers come out clearly.

Drug addiction changes the user's perceptions of time, speeding it up during the rush, slowing down to nothing while waiting for the fix. In the frantic life of *Bombardiers*, we do not see many longueurs, which ratchets up our sense of overall speed. Almost everything is rush, but with no ecstasy in the high, just scrabbling urgency. In one three page sequence (298–300), a man collapses because his asthma inhaler has been emptied by an angry colleague (and he is probably nearly killed by an accountant doing CPR on him). Another smashes his Quotron screen, and because all the other screens are linked to a single cable, all of them go out, bringing effective sales to a halt. Flying glass from the screen cuts someone slightly, who has hysterics over the blood. Those trying to sell scream when their screens go blank. Indeed, Sid shrieks that he's blind, since being unable to see quotes effectively blinds him. High tension, multi-event scenes like this are commonplace.

Bronson contextualizes these brokers as just parts of a much larger machine. We see how its units multiply:

> The information economy was a Ponzi scheme spiraling out of control. The investment bankers got rich slaving away, so they called in their tax accountants, who got so rich filing government forms that they called their investment bankers back for advice about where to invest their surging wealth. The investment bankers were also miserable, so they called their therapists. . . . They worked so hard they neglected their families, so many of which ended up in divorce. They called their divorce lawyers. The lawyers worked even harder than the investment bankers and suffered physical maladies that the doctors charged them ridiculous fees to attempt to cure. The doctors, worried about being sued by the lawyers, called their insurance brokers for malpractice coverage. The engineers built computer systems that helped all of them speed up this cycle so they could call and bill at a faster pace. (66)

The passage goes on to politicians, and eventually back to accountants and investment bankers. Not only do individuals become addicted to the demands, the whole system is addicted to its own surges of demand and power, and cannot survive without them.

Let me offer a final example of multiplication from Fran Ross's *Oreo*. Like John Edgar Wideman's *Hurry Home* and William Melvin Kelley's *Dunsfords Travels Everywheres*, Ross is an African American experimentalist demonstrating skill at playing the Joyce game. Like *Ulysses*, *Oreo* is based on classical myth, the story of Theseus, so all the encounters (once Oreo starts her quest) refer back to Theseus's rather obscure adventures on his way to Athens and from there to Crete and back. This gives Ross a large number of plot elements that, since even well-read readers are unlikely to recognize them, means that we find many episodes that do not seem to link particularly logically. Not only do seemingly unconnected plot elements pile up, but multiplication is also seen in registers of voice. Oreo (Christina Schwartz), daughter of an aspiring Jewish actor and an African American woman, speaks all the tongues of those around her: Yiddish, southern "mush mouth," the French of gourmet menus, mathematical equations, the clotted prose of agronomic economics, the language of dirty jokes and heavy breathers, the arcana of the OED, sometimes mingling several on the same page. Like the narrator of Beatty's *White Boy Shuffle*, she can do anything from many different cultural registers exceedingly and zestfully well.

Subtraction, the second technique for creating speed to be discussed, almost always works in tandem with multiplication. If you multiply events but connect them logically, the speed-effect will be minimal. The action will merely seem underdeveloped. To get speed, we need to feel that we are missing out on meaningful transitions and links. Ross's presentation of Oreo gives us such subtraction. Oreo's omnicompetence produces a kind of speed because her performative displays are justified by so little plausible detail that we cannot connect these skills realistically with her life. We can shrug and say that she must be brilliant, or give up representational assumptions and remember that she is not a "person." We lose our sense of control because of what is missing. One way for a writer to achieve speed, therefore, is to cut out the Barthesian effects of the real—the narrative material a traditional reader expects to provide what John Gardner's Grendel calls "a gluey whine of connectedness" (Barthes 142–3; Gardner 55). When the details that stabilize fictional "reality" are absent, those trained in conventional literature feel that absence as an artifact of speeding along too fast. Ross ostentatiously calls attention to cutting such detail. Oreo remarks, "There is no weather per se in this book. Passing reference is made to weather in a few instances. Assume whatever season you like throughout. Summer makes the most sense in a book of this length. That way, pages do not have to be used up describing people taking off and putting on overcoats" (5). Given that Oreo sleeps in a park one night and wears a white dress, we can assume summer weather, at least for the quest sequence, but of course we are also being reminded that this is a literary construct, not a fictional representation of reality.

Oreo's travels by bus and subway become frenetic not because she travels fast but because we follow her mind as it leaps from one fantasy to the next, without significant linkages. She wonders about the funk quotient of the Jets vs. the Knicks—is

football smellier than basketball? She fast cuts to imagining a female fan running onto the field during the Superbowl and being eaten by the players in a strange ritual subsequently denied by all concerned. She finds herself on a "crazy ladies" bus and we hear some of their comments. She reads headlines from tabloids and fastidiously recoils at the use of "tots" and "mom" in a story about infanticide (110). A few pages later, she accuses a redheaded boy of having midget blood, although he is normal height, and when she meets his parents, she finds them indeed to be midgets. Thus the unlikely or irrational or magic realist detail can also add to our sense of haste if it is not developed to the point of seeming culturally validated. We are left panting for connections, for some kind of logic to hold this together. The effect works for conventionally trained readers, but would obviously not work the same way for someone with no sense of what we call realistic fiction or someone culturally attuned to such speed.

The Canadian writer Douglas Coupland's *Microserfs* also gets a lot of its speed effect from subtraction. His target is the lives of those who work for Microsoft (or Apple, or Intel, or any of numerous Silicon Valley industries). He follows several semi-interchangeable people working at Microsoft who decide to split off and form their own company. We are given the Jeopardy categories that represent each of them. One, for instance, would use FORTRAN, Pascal, ADA (defense contracting code), LISP, Neil Peart (drummer for Rush), Hugo and Nebula award winners, and Sir Lancelot (6–12). The others are similarly computer-oriented and narrow in outside interests. We watch these geeks tying themselves in knots over possible implications of taking a short cut across the lawn, being flamed by Bill Gates, or wondering how much it will affect them if the project they work on turns out to be a loser. Such trivia would not in itself make this a speed novel were the characters themselves not so thin, so lacking in connective tissue to their lives. Because they do lack depth, we watch many slight variations on the daily lives such as the Jeopardy categories, and have trouble distinguishing one from another. The sense of speed also comes from the characters always feeling behind, feeling that they need to do more, stay later, push themselves harder, write more code, worry about shipping date. They don't feel they can sustain serious relationships with anyone because Microsoft consumes their lives.

Coupland thinks in terms of cartoons, their quick-jumps from one state to another: "And then, I thought about us . . . these children who fell down life's cartoon holes . . . dreamless children, alive but not living—we emerged on the other side of the cartoon holes fully awake and discovered we were whole" (371 ellipses in original). While Dan's picture of an elective family emerging from the two-dimensional individuals is what goes on when they fall down the hole, he imagines the process as lacking any such explanation. Like cartoon characters, they fall down and then emerge, feeling okay.

Turning consensus reality into fantasmagoria is the third technique that I find in transgressive fiction for creating narrative speed. Fantasy of many sorts can exist without affecting narrative pace. What makes such departures from reality relevant here is the creation of puzzling anomalies for which no explanation is given. Without any logic supplied—a subtractive technique—we feel that we must have missed

something, or that we are too dense to see a symbolic meaning and should go back and read again. Doing so will not help us, though. This simple puzzle-effect leading to speed can be seen in Coover's *John's Wife*. Pauline grows to giantess size in a few days, and adds breathless haste to her other problems by being driven about town in a van, screeching around corners and skidding, the pace necessary to keep rumor from catching up with her and Cornell and to let them find or steal enough food to keep her from starving. We never know why she grows or how large she becomes, because statements that she can kick a car as if it were a football are called rumors. We do see her pick a man up in one hand as if he were a doll, though, and bullets sting and madden her, but do not kill. The mob has to kill her by burning down the woods around her. In another fantastic sequence, an adolescent called Turtle, who has been missing several months, is literally reborn, in his adolescent size and shape, from the monstrously large belly of the preacher's wife, Beatrice. Her own, normal-sized baby, pops out after this teenager, almost unnoticed. Even Turtle's amniotically wet clothes come out after him. While Turtle is in this second womb, we experience a variety of his ecstatic experiences that seem part orgasmic and part cosmogonic, as if we were seeing the big bang or a nova.

When we try to put such fantasmic events in some sort of meaningful perspective, we find that we cannot. The mysteries overwhelm our drive toward ordering things logically. We sense that John's wife's becoming invisible bears some relationship to Pauline's becoming all too visible; they are each other's opposites, and they mysteriously blend on a film of the photographer Gordon. John's wife was evidently the only one of her set to be virgin at her wedding, while Pauline had inducted most of her male cohort into sexual joys, being in that respect more like John himself, though Pauline's promiscuity grows out of grotesque sexual abuse in childhood from Daddy Duwayne. Practically all the town's men have slept with the one and covet the other. Only when Pauline is burned as a monster in the woods can the town cast out its shadow-scapegoat and return to a semblance of normality. Why does John's wife again become visible at Pauline's death? What are we to see in Bruce's sadism, hitherto unmanifested? Were those or the rather active aborted fetus that haunts one of the women the only mysteries, we could cobble together an explanation, but what price Turtle's being reborn? and from that mother? What is served by that departure from consensus reality?

The fantasmagoria we cannot explain, the relative shortness of scenes, the lack of clear transitions from one to the next, the repeated scenes of physical speed, and above all the sheer number of plot units and people: all these leave us feeling disoriented, as if we have been blindfolded and then turned in circles. Clearly we are not supposed to be able to put everything neatly into a framework; the town itself is, on the surface, such a framework, and we are all too aware that the frame belies the darker shadows beneath the surface. Were we just to say that kinky sexualities lurk beneath respectable surfaces, this would be unsurprising and of no great interest. More intriguing is the sense that the book reflects tensions between order and disorder, the latter not being chaos so much as an active force for anti-order, something trying to overthrow the accepted way of doing things. While middle-class readers may—reluctantly—opt for the side of order, it not being very attractive here, we are

uneasy about that choice even if doubtful about what might be gained by disorder. Who would be hurt by it? Would we? How much? What freedoms would we gain?

When confronted with texts that challenge us by cutting out connective narrative tissue, we mostly rely on our rational faculties to try to put the narrative fragments together in some meaningful fashion. The fantasmagoric works that model drug experience kick that prop out from under us.[6] They attack rationality itself. Burroughs is famous for using every drug and combination of drugs invented by humanity, and while I am not arguing that any particular text of his was written under chemical influence, he does in literary terms create a narrative fragmenting of consciousness that suggests drug experience to readers. By contrast, Mark Leyner is described by William Grimes as leading an entirely drug-free life (Grimes 51). Nonetheless, his novel's characters mention using marijuana (35), snorting cocaine (44), being on Methedrine suppositories (49), and they use drug words frequently—one is "habitually abusing an illegal growth hormone" and has "overdosed" on television (3–4). Leyner's blurb writers note the meth-like rush of his writing. Whether the drugs are literal or merely a model for the literary technique, they lie behind the speed effects in Darius James's *Negrophobia*, Burroughs's *The Ticket that Exploded*, and Leyner's *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist*.

James, Burroughs, and Leyner all challenge reality, though in a manner that creates confusion rather than Coover's sense of mystery. James's *Negrophobia*, for instance, uses many of the subtractive and multiplying techniques, but pushes us much further into the realm of the fantastic. In such a world, we have no way of supplying connections. Not only are they missing, but we do not sense what they might have been. Or, as Ronald A. T. Judy puts it in his article, "*Negrophobia* is about order, about the presence or absence of order . . . about what order means, how it is apprehended" (181). He goes on, "The idea that linguistic order implies meaning—that a narrative is the sign of purposive reality—is a principal casualty of *Negrophobia.* The narrative of *Negrophobia* provides no clear perspective, no point of view from which it can be determined when one reality collides or slips into another" (Judy 181). In this satiric farrago, a white girl called Bubbles Brazil is punished by her family's black maid for her racist attitudes through vodoun and the transdermal application of belladonna and other hallucinogens. We realize that what she experiences may have no relationship to an external reality, but we are never sure of any episode's reality status because all of this is a fantasmagoria of white fears and stereotypes regarding black people, all of them being signified upon or made angry fun of.

What we are to make of Bubbles is further confused by her preference for talking jive, dropping into rap verse, and seeming very like many of the shadowy black figures she feels threatened by, such as the roller derby girls who menace her in a restroom. Not that we as readers have uniform responses or assumptions. For most African American readers, Bubbles' exaggerated fears of blacks are presumably funny if disgusting. Some white readers will be rendered uneasy by black attacks on whites. Religious readers, black or white, might be offended by some of the jokes. How does a pious Black Muslim feel about "Min. Louis Farrakhan's 'Ambrosia of Islam' Do-for-Self Designer Chocolates '*Allah eats 'em! And you will too!*'" (3).

These prove to be "frog-faced fudge figurines . . . [bearing] a likeness of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. He clutches candy genitalia in tiny fudge fists. Spurts of white chocolate fleck his thighs" (3)? Even those of other faiths might be made uncomfortable by that comic-grotesque portrayal of a religious leader.

James emphasizes his techniques for cutting narrative connectivity by setting up the entire novel as a film script. The images he wants are described, and some commentary is added as voice over, but basically the reader must jump from scene to scene, relying for any sense of what is happening on the instructions as to what the camera is to show. The scene will be an interior—a cave one time, a church the next. In the cave Bubbles is surrounded by licorice men, doughboys, and flaming tar babies, their activities reminiscent of a Broadway chorus line. In the church, H. Rap Remus preaches the craziness of the "Whyte Man" and upholds Idi Amin, not Haile Selassie, as the "living incarnation of God on Earth" (77). Bubbles is at first accepted by them because her skin is covered with paint from a paint factory scene (signifying on the *Invisible Man*). When her baptism washes off the paint, however, she vomits up huge worms in a very Burroughsian sequence, and manages to run away. She next finds herself in movie theatres, and what happens on screen or between her and other viewers supply the next action sequences. How she gets to more than one theatre or why is not explained.

Bubbles as embodier of white prejudices and fears is not the only target. Her equivalent at the social level is the world of Walt Disney. A honky-mutant crowd roars "*Heil Mickey* CHRIST!" and we see a new crucifixion (106). "Mickey Christ hangs by his inflated white-gloved hands on a neon-lit cross with his owlish Walter Kean eyes staring sadly at the sky." Meanwhile, "a YARMULKED BIRD peeps under Mickey's loincloth" and says with a thick Yiddish accent, "Circumsize? What's to circumsize?" (107). Without warning, we then find ourselves in Sleeping Beauty Castle and a giant snot-pouring nose snails its way in. "With a mighty sneeze, the GODZILLA-SIZED PROBOSCIS erupts like a lava-spewing volcano, slathering the streets in a thick carpet of mucus. Brown boulder-sized boogers tumble down the street, crushing panicked pedestrians" (108–9)—somewhat Burroughsian, but also reminiscent of Pynchon's giant adenoid in *Gravity's Rainbow* (14–16).

So what does this fantasia accomplish? Disney's sexless world and the entire Disney empire's maintenance of those traditional white, sexless values is attacked, in part because that neutered world produces the sexual fantasies projected by whites on blacks. Were whites in better touch with their own bodily urges and less repressed by their cultural patterns, such projection might not have produced the history of lynching. Speeding from one location to another, we get the sense of these fantasies roiling about in Bubbles' mind. They well up uncontrollably. In a blurb on the cover, George Trow points out that James's "subject is the big one: slavery; his questions are the big ones: who is slave to what?" Bubbles in her helpless whirl is very much enslaved by her fears, her fantasies, and the manipulations of her servant/mammy.

Were extreme choppiness all, Burroughs's novel (or is it a collection of stories?) *The Ticket that Exploded* would merely represent a multiplication of short plot units, as in Ishmael Reed, deprived of connective materials. However, he is aiming for different effects, and makes no pretense of telling even as much story as Reed

does. Burroughs talks about his cut-up technique (e.g., 18–20), the splicing of tapes, whether at two second intervals for a tape recorder or the hypothetical twenty four times per second of film speed, in order to produce a melding, the merging of two people (by intercutting their body sounds like heart beat, for instance) or phenomena like sounds of a riot. He elsewhere talks about cutting and pasting manuscripts so they become interwoven from tiny units of text. Part of what he plays on is the idea of subliminal conditioning, the theory that one frame per second in a film showing a bottle of Coca Cola, though not consciously registered by viewers, would make them thirsty for Coke.

Burroughs illustrates this technique—which relies on multiplying, subtracting, and rendering fantastic—in the chapter called "Do you love me?" Fragments of old-fashioned popular songs, some of them heterosexual love songs, are interspersed with the sexual imagery Burroughs uses for homosexual orgasms. For a conventional reader who recognizes the song fragments, those fragments define the foreground of the passage, while the more enigmatic references to Burroughs's sexuality form the subliminal disturber. "Jelly jelly jelly shifting color orgasm back home—Scratching shower of sperm that made cover of the board books—It's a long way to Tipperary—soft luminous spurts to my blue heaven—Pieces of cloud drifted through all the tunes from blue—Exploded in cosmic laughter of cable cars . . . Me?—Oh, darling, i love you in constant motion—i love you i do" (45). If not homosexual love, then the subliminals include images of wandering in alleys, of skin seen through open shirt, plus instructions to take a tape and splice it with other sounds. We get the subliminals that belong to the real sex world of Burroughs, while the banal songs supply much of the foreground—"A Bicycle Built for Two," "Bye Bye Blackbird," "Tipperary," "Waltzing Matilda," "If You Were the Only Girl in the World," "Red River Valley," "The Sheik of Araby," "When the Saints go Marching In," and "Rock around the Clock." Throughout is a third theme, basically statements that "I love you" or questions of "whether you love me," *demands* for love, for acknowledgment of love. Burroughs associates such demands for demonstrativeness and exclusivity with heterosexual love, and treats everything heterosexual as viral in origin, a horrible disease.

What Burroughs gains from these chopped up bits whizzing by us is our being bombarded by the sentimental tunes with their implicit slavery to the woman coupled to our being exposed to flashes of his alternative world at the almost subliminal level. That alternative offers a release from the maddening banality. His next chapter concerns the "Other Half," "a separate organism attached to your nervous system on an air line of words" (49) that he treats as female, possibly as a wife. His way of escaping the other half is to splice tapes: "Splice your body sounds in with air hammers. Blast jolt vibrate the 'Other Half' right out into the street" (50). For Burroughs, the authority being revolted against is female, and drugs help break down all the systems of order that rise from those female demands that life be regulated.

Burroughs wants to use his cut up technique either to evict an unwanted part of self or to join the true self to another, friendly male self. The intercut material speeds by too quickly to be controlled, and he can then hope to merge or dissolve ties. Insofar as he writes for an audience other than himself, he probably wishes to have some-

thing like that effect on readers, flashing material by but influencing them with the many repeated phrases, the subliminals, the vivid images. Because these come quickly, we can do little to process them. A few sequences will hold our attention for their slower pace—the fantasmagoria in which a boy evidently produces an offspring (and grows gills) without female intercession, or the green and red orchid that produces uncontrollable iterated orgasms and turns one of the male partners into a woman—but these supply no extended plot, just vivid images, titillations for the imagination, reasons, perhaps to keep reading if we tire of the snippets flashing by.

Mark Leyner takes the effect of speed one notch higher in *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist*. Whereas Burroughs's chapters often have some kind of core fantasy, Leyner's chapters (or are they stories?) seem even further removed from ordinary narrative. Burroughs's use and reuse of particular characters produces passages of similar tone (the Nova police sections, for instance). Leyner repeats his material far less often, and seems more zany, less limited in situation and tone, and hence far less predictable. He cites animated cartoons as one of his models: "anything could happen and inevitably did and at dizzying speeds. A character could drive a hot rod to Mars and back, pull into a diner on the highway, sing a duet with his fried chicken leg, and then become the king of the Eskimos—in five seconds! Wonderful!" (Leyner, "Maximum" 229) Leyner has, of course, been interpreted as reflecting the speed of his era: "with *My Cousin* Leyner had invented a new form of 'realism' perfectly suited to the postmodern Electronic Age. The 'experimental' features of his work are in fact 'natural' reflections of the frantic pace of mass media (and of MTV and rock music particularly)" ("Maximum" 220–1).

We have, truly, to enjoy being surprised when we read Leyner's *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist*, because we can derive no generic expectations from his riffs, and although I have read it three times, I cannot say what it is "about." Grimes unequivocally calls it a collection of stories rather than a novel; Leyner himself says it is more novel than collection of stories ("Maximum" 235). Neither one nor the other by most standards, it has much the same wandering pattern and shifting focal figures unified by general tone that characterizes Burroughs's book as well.

In the first chapter, for instance, the narrator is driving to Las Vegas (echoes of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*), and has swerved to avoid running over crusty scabs scratched from the heads of those in the convertible ahead of him. He pulls over to try a wayside eatery implausibly advertising "FOIE GRAS AND HARICOTS VERTS NEXT EXIT" (3). Here he orders primordial soup (ammonia and methane mixed—perhaps an echo of Pynchon's revolting alliterative menu), but leaves because he dislikes the atmosphere and tries another eatery where the Japanese waitress slices wafers of gallium arsenide crystal and serves them with soy and wasabi. Later, he finds himself in a bar where a cyborg "walks in and whips out a 35-lb. phallus made of corrosion-resistant nickel-base alloy and he begins to stroke it sullenly. . . . It can ejaculate herbicides, sulfuric acid, tar glue, you name it" (5). The narrator mentions some of the drugs he is on—steroids, growth hormone—and he gets high on Sinutab. When he sees a woman he fancies in a bar, he cracks "an ampule of mating pheromone" and drinks methyl isocyanate (of Bhopal disaster fame) on the rocks (6). She falls for him, but they are declared genetically identical, and

such incest is forbidden, so he brings out a device that fragments genes in cells, and he scrambles their chromosomes, but then we segue into a fantasy of his being born a chicken bouillon cube, his growing up a weakling until he worked out and took hormones and steroids, and now "the mightiest oaks blanch and tremble" and birds shit from fear (8). Because the actions are arbitrary and nonsensical, and because no explanations are given, the result is speed as well as fantasmagoria.

Some of these images do recur—the gigantic sexualized robot, whose bulging anatomy makes it a double to the narrator, with his steroid-enhanced musculature. Mostly what we get though is a random-seeming exposure to fantasies derived from popular culture. These include filmic robots, an allusion to Willard's painting "The Spirit of '76" when the narrator describes whistling "like an earsplitting fife being played by a lunatic with a bloody bandage around his head" (8), popular knowledge of sushi and computer chips, jokes based on Elvis Presley's "Jailhouse Rock," colonic irrigation clinics (the gastroenterological motif), and a beauty-salon parody of military maneuvers. Some of the cultural references are more academic: someone writing for an Israeli semiotics journal (44), a T. S. Eliot take-off ("salesmen come and go, murmuring 'jerry lewis est mort,' " 70), and reference to Dino de Laurentiis's film of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in which "the huge metal robotic women who come and go talking of Michelangelo collapsed—crushing the aging Oscar winners" (103). Someone's skin is "as translucent as the tissue-thin page of a norton anthology" (109). Sometimes words semiotically unfold to become the action: pronounce the "th" in Thailand, and what evolves is "all restaurants in thighland offer ballet parking lanky black youths in fuchsia tutus glissading into automobiles and gracefully backing into rows" (36). Some of the registers are more mythological or spoof-mythology. "This father's nose is so big that if you took each of his nose hairs, tied them together, and put a hook on the end, you could stand on the moon and fish in lake michigan," though this may also parody Barthelme's *The Dead Father* (111). Some passages are definitely Burroughsian in their physical grotesquerie. And mentioned along the way are various drugs that might have some bearing on this vision of the world: methedrine suppositories, cocaine, quaaludes, and crack.

The methedrine passage shows one kind of speed by cramming in lots of productive activity: "As I iron a pair of tennis shorts I dictate a haiku into the tape recorder and then dash off to snake a clogged drain in the bathroom sink and then do three minutes on the speedbag before making an origami praying mantis and then reading an article in *High Fidelity* magazine as I stir the coq au vin . . . cleaning the venetian blinds, defrosting the freezer, translating *The Ring of the Nibelung* into Black English, gluing a model aircraft carrier together for my little son. I'm writing to my congressman, doing push-ups, changing a light bulb as I floss my teeth and feed my fish with one hand, balance my checkbook with the other and scratch my borzoi's silky stomach with my big toe" (49). That, though accelerated to the maximum, is in fact easier to follow and rationalize than the rest of the novel. This meth suppository-enhanced passage is merely filled with more activities than one could actually carry out at once. The rest produces the effects of being too fast because we cannot understand and stitch together the often fantastic actions into a coherent whole.

Multiplying, subtracting, and rendering fantastic, then, are three techniques used to generate rapid narrative pace in contemporary fiction. In some ways, they cannot be separated, since multiplying without subtraction just produces long narratives; subtracting without multiplying would produce very short narratives, and rendering the fictive world fantastic relies both on adding puzzling elements and subtracting any explanation. Simply noting techniques, though, is not enough to make sense of narrative speed. The authorial aims they satisfy, the effect on readers, and the politics of their deployment need to be analyzed.

THE AIMS AND EFFECTS OF NARRATIVE SPEED

Speed produces a range of effects varying from irritation and bewilderment to exhilaration. Because these are audience responses, a single novel may produce any of the possible effects, depending on the mindset of the reader. In simplest terms, the negatives typify a first (though not necessarily a final) reaction of conventional readers, while the positives are more readily available to hip readers. Further variations stem from whether the novel resembles a satire in attacking some portion of its world, or whether the reader's own mind is targeted.

I hesitate to call any of these novels satires, because they show no signs of expecting reform; they project no high moral norm; and they show humor but none of the wit characteristic of traditional satires. They do, though, excoriate modern society. Fran Ross, celebrating a young girl's superlative performances, is to some extent targeting male aspects of society, black or white, though particularly white. Reed invites our contempt for governmental and legal sources of oppression. His focal figure, Nance Saturday, had done well in law school but dropped out, once he realized that "There's no law in this country. Only power and class—" (*Twos* 27). James blisteringly makes fun of the web of unconscious white fantasies and fears that continue to poison racial relations in America. The nightmare side of those fears produces the fantasias of genitals, mutilations, Burroughsian metamorphoses, and many situations of threat, disgust, and distaste. The daytime side, just as sickening, produces African Americans tamed and whitened, co-opted, stolen-from, or Disneyfied. Bronson and Coupland savage the world of business and its inhuman efficiency ethic. Burroughs turns the blow-torch of his mind against bourgeois values; these he associates with female values, which he sees as a terrible virus that has infected humanity.

The attitudes of Coover and Leyner are harder to place. Coover to some extent makes fun of the heartland American small town society, but he also plays against generic expectations as, for instance, when he introduces John as a fairy-tale hero.[7] Leyner seems more celebratory than critical, but the world of his characters is a yuppie me-generation world, and it does not emerge as particularly attractive, what with cocktails made of poisons and food from computer chips. As in Coover's fiction, any restraints we can sense in the worlds of Leyner (and of Burroughs) must be broken if we are to be free or enjoy ourselves. Not for Leyner or Burroughs the careful pondering of Saul Bellow's Albert Corde in *The Dean's December*, who feels that some restraints are necessary for civil society and tries to figure out which ones matter

(285–6). Their speed vision is more romantic or anarchic, perhaps also a more infantile concept of bliss in its self-centeredness. Bellow remains concerned with society as a whole, while Burroughs and Leyner exalt the individual and pursue enjoyment. In that sense they are consumers, not producers, an understanding of Leyner that is used as praise by William G. Little. The practicalities of making a living do not intrude on their plots. This makes their worlds singularly privileged, though they might claim that the privilege was matched by their risks in exploring the further limits of the mind and pushing conventional readers far beyond where many would wish to go.

Readers susceptible to the euphoric effect are likely to be young and probably non-mainstream in some fashion. Part of what this audience would enjoy is these authors' display of superior flash in the face of plodding white middle-class norms. Authors such as Reed, James, Ross, Coupland, Bronson, and Leyner revel in their knowledge of popular cultural references, black and white. They deliberately juggle these in a way that commands admiration. Speed has always been the tool of separating an "us" from a "them." One talks fast in jive—or in Cockney in London, or Pig Latin among children, or Verlan in French—and Whitey or the powers of law and order or the squares will never understand. Such an "us" may be minority in identity, or can even just be those who see themselves as radical, rebellious, and young. One learns to deal more comfortably with speed from rap, MTV, stand up comedy, and *South Park* than from grand opera or Victorian novels. Leyner clearly expects an audience with this taste, and assumes that exposure to his speed is a purely enjoyable experience. Far from seeing his work as assaulting the reader, he sees it as "so dense with pleasure, so unrelentingly enjoyable, so packed with event" (Grimes 64) that the reader cannot skip over any of it. Everything wordy and boring has been excised. Anyone who has taught novels by Burroughs, Leyner, or Kathy Acker will remember that most of the class seems puzzled and even offended, but a few students will glow with approval and feel that at last they have found someone who speaks to them. Writing for this audience only, however, would be preaching to the choir; they are not the ones in need of being troubled or shaken by the politics of such speed. Hence, the necessity of reaching a larger and less compatible audience.

Speed rewards the hip reader and anyone not perfectly attuned to the idiom suffers the assault. Some readers will persist and get a feel for the rhythm—and indeed second readings rarely feel as speedy—in which case, the reader wins some protection from the attack and to a degree accepts new standards. That first reading, though, produces in the targeted reader a sense of disorientation, an inability to understand all that happens because it rushes by too quickly to be pinned down.

The most immediate effect of narrative speed upon resisting readers is bewilderment. That sensation makes most readers feel more vulnerable to any source of force within the narrative, whether authority against which the speed is being used or the power of the author. One feels smaller in regard to the nexus of political power in Reed, to Microsoft or capitalist enterprise in Coupland and Bronson. Bewilderment also serves the ends of those writers who wish us to ask why one should be mistreated for being female or black or homosexual (Ross, Burroughs).

Narrative speed, when used to produce drug-like effects, pushes us beyond

bewilderment to a sense that we have lost control. Our lives are held together by the ordering systems we generate, and aggressive speed pushes us to experience life without such systems, a situation resembling some forms of insanity. The ideology of producing this effect is paradox-ridden. Being unconstructed by the discourses of others makes one remarkably free, but without the power or impulse to form one's own systems, one is likely to be passive, helpless, and vulnerable to others who are more organized. One can withdraw so far into oneself that society ceases to be meaningful, in which case, the value of freedom is questionable. We see this much more fundamental kind of attack in Burroughs and Leyner. While James might seem to produce this state of asocial liberty, Bubbles is being exposed to her own prejudices; insofar as she represents a "person," she can learn from this to be a more worthy participant in society.

As readers, we subject ourselves to these experiences of vulnerability and loss of control for a variety of reasons. We may temporarily enjoy being lost in a funhouse, and bewilderment can supply that frisson of being lost while not posing so much threat as to drive us away from the book. Or we may enjoy a book that seems to outsmart us, that takes us beyond our usual relationship with reading matter. We may welcome a new experience or the sense of transgressing. Even the most logical and controlled readers may enjoy vicarious fragmentation of mind; such readers might not risk drugs in real life, but may be curious. We may read the text to fight with it. We may try to impose our sense of an appropriate order, even if in the end we fail; the text is in that case a challenge or test to us. We may read because we do not like being bettered (or battered) by a book, and refusing to be cowed is our answer to the assault. We may be carried along by humor or zest.

Those most divorced from the values of their culture may truly enjoy all radical fracturing of order, all attempts to smash and destroy assumptions, expectations, and rules. Radical destructiveness in literature, however, is a far cry from acting it out in real life. In this sense the politics of speed is limited to a temporary effect. Not only does it tend to attenuate upon a second reading, it also does not have much immediate effect outside of literature. Randy Schroeder argues (regarding Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*) that it "tries to leap beyond social and representational structures into new, chaotic, energetic life. . . . But because it fails to critique its social object, because it has no ethic, it unwittingly finds new ways to engage in old conversations. *Naked Lunch* demonstrates that it is not always enough to simply overturn narrative structures" (92). And later: "A shift in narrative strategy does not guarantee a shift in how we think of and negotiate power" (96).

I suggested at the outset that speed in these novels did not just reflect or complain about cultural speed. Rather, narrative rapidity usually pointed to something beyond cultural speed as its target. What I sense as the target is ultimately stable structures in society and in consciousness. The target is rationality, our usual means of making sense of confusion. This attack is most obvious in the visions modeled on drug speed. Where these authors differ from the humdrum bourgeois attitude is in enjoying and encouraging the breakdown of control and logic. Kathy Acker shared this viewpoint: in *Empire of the Senseless*, she screams "GET RID OF MEANING. YOUR MIND IS A NIGHTMARE THAT HAS BEEN EATING YOU: NOW EAT

YOUR MIND" (38). Clearly we are supposed to enjoy casting off inner restraints and going with the flow, and cover blurbs on these novels suggest that some readers do. Although drugs are not part of their technique, Coover, Ross, and Reed also enjoy breaking social constraints.

The ultimate emotions that seem produced by speed are criticism of the world and a sense of personal exaltation, often combined. Speed frequently correlates to literary high spirits. Ross, Reed, and James certainly seem to value speed for its lightness, and lightness as antidote to the ponderous burdens of the white middle-class power structure. Leyner and Burroughs are high on their own novelty, their visionary departures from consensus reality, their rejection of old-fashioned writing. Because their worlds are least structured, they risk the most in terms of readers closing the book, but they offer the most to readers capable of feeling their ecstasy. They try hardest to push the reader beyond some kind of edge, shake the reader loose from comfort and tradition. All of these writers risk something to put the reader on that place beyond the edge, an edge that has little to do with any sense of cultural velocity and its anxieties. These authors have found that only by speeding can one outrun and outstrip constricting tradition and norms. Since the mental distress and confusion wear thin on second reading, the politics of this kind of speed must be seen in terms of long-term effects. No single work will change readers' mindsets, but the accumulation over time of authors and texts like these create familiarity, even comfort with the unstructured world.

ENDNOTES

1. For analysis of how speed permeates modernist culture, see Kern and Benesch; Danius discusses Proust's rhetoric of speed, and various ways he suggests speed, such as writing as if the automobile is stationary while scenery and buildings hurl themselves at it. While this creates narrative excitement, it need not sensibly quicken his narrative pace.

2. Translator Benjamin Sher prefers to call it "enstrangement" (*Theory of Prose* xviii–xix) to make clear the non-standard nature of the word *ostraneniye* in Russian.

3. I shall discuss *John's Wife* instead of *Gerald's Party*, but for an analysis of the latter that recognizes its strange speed, see Jonathan Shaw.

4. For a good discussion of contemporary compression of space-time based on its relationship to the economic shift from Fordism to flexible accumulation of capital, see David Harvey, especially chapter 17, "Time-Space compression and the postmodern condition" (284–307). Derrida analyzes cultural speed from a nuclear perspective, and Benesch identifies a number of postmodern writers whose response to cultural speed is to suggest that we are becoming mired or wrecking ourselves into stasis.

5. Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, p. 18 for one of many examples.

6. Amphetamines ("speed") were first synthesized in the 1880s, and were viewed as wonder drugs in the 1930s. They were heavily used, perfectly legally, throughout World War II and the Korean War to keep those giving orders and those operating machinery awake for long stints, a role they still play illegally for truck drivers. They later became popular for suppressing hunger and as enhancers of sports performance, and (under the name of Ritalin) are still used to quiet "overactive" children (Jenkins 29–32). Marcus Boon studies writers known for writing under the influence of various drugs. Several famous authors openly touted amphetamines for the concentration and energy these drugs gave them to pro-

duce their material: Jack Kerouac, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Philip K. Dick were all amphetamine users, and exhibit the unedited gushes of words and in Dick's case, the paranoia, associated with serious use of speed.

7. For Coover's struggle against all sorts of bonds, see Hume.

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