Gaining Speed: Car Culture, Adrenaline, and the Experience of Speed

Speed is the form of ecstasy the technical revolution has bestowed on man.
—Milan Kundera, *Slowness*

Our little car was almost ready. She was later to be called Auntie after Gertrude Stein's aunt Pauline who always behaved admirably in emergencies and behaved fairly well most times if she was properly flattered.
—Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

The automobile has come to show even the slowest minds that the earth is truly round, that the heart is just a poetic relic, that a human being contains two standard gauges: one indicates miles, the other minutes.
—Ilya Ehrenburg, *The Life of the Automobile*

It was not until 1927 that the roller coaster had competition from the newest attraction: the Dodgem car.[1] The roller coaster had offered speed as a thrill and had shown how this private thrill could be staged as a public spectacle, but it was still modeled on the train. The passenger did not drive; the journey was plotted in advance; there was a departure point and a known terminus. The Dodgem car made the thrills and spills the driver's responsibility: your journey, your crashes, your skill. This experience, the attraction taught you, was a huge comedy.

Robert Frank's photograph of a couple on a Dodgem car ride (figure 6) was taken in 1952, in the postwar moment when all the dreams promised by the speed culture built up in the previous half century appeared to come to pass. The photograph flashes before the viewer in full the complex of thrills—ecstasies, even—that a Dodgem car ride, and car culture itself,

FIGURE 6. Robert Frank, *Couple, Paris, 1952*. Silver gelatin developed-out print. National Gallery of Art, Washington, Robert Frank Collection, gift (partial and promised) of Robert Frank. Courtesy of the artist.

put on offer. First note the isolation: although there must have been a dozen cars on the platform, the rest, given the changes in visibility when traveling at speed, and when speed effects are photographed, become a blur of fairy lights. This thrill, too, then, is to be relished alone. The car gets to replace the fearful home, for here is a couple, and the ecstatic straining of the man's face—at the momentum, at the torque, with the woman—vividly inscribe the interface of sexual desire and technology that, from its first outing, the automobile fostered and came to represent. Then read the woman's smile: reaching out to the photographer in a kind of communication, yet with eyes quite shut against the car's speed, she laughs—hilariously, shamelessly, excitedly—because for the car's driver, the power to steer, to drive where one wants, on a stage where every crash is merely a thump of rubber on rubber and a collision framed in laughter, is a power so intoxicating and so childishly simple that it provokes glee. In the Dodgem car, the driving thrill is granted in isolation, it is suggestive of sexual ecstasy, and it is cast above all as comedy. The steering wheel rounds smoothly, the car careens in an out-of-control curve, the participants shriek and laugh wildly. Car culture and its psychosomatisms were in full swing.

This is a chapter about the invention of the automobile and its cultural

effects; it is also a chapter on the invention of adrenaline. Adrenaline was first isolated as a human hormone in 1900; its molecular structure was determined in 1904. I, however, want to use "adrenaline" as a code word for a new intuition of the novel emotional, psychic, and somatic possibilities raised by the conjunction of the technological prosthesis of the automobile and the human organism. A rush of adrenaline is what underpins the grin and the drawn faces of the couple in that Dodgem car; it names a profoundly new conception of human energy, displaying itself in a complex of new human intensities, that is imagined to surge in the human subject as she interacts with the speed-producing machine. This rush is a new, if subtle, moment in the history of human awareness of the senses. "Car culture," then, is the annotation of the pleasures and the terrors that this new rush provides and the languages in which they could be expressed. The self-advertising tricks of the automobile as new technology launched this discourse; soon diverse forms were exploring the nuances of emotion, sensory heightening, and psychic awareness engendered by the interaction between new machine and human subject. Car culture, even at its most lowbrow, struggled to articulate passions that were up to now not quite imagined before, at least not in these forms. Doing so, it traced the outlines of a new version of what the term "culture" itself demarcates.

Karl Marx, when thinking a half century earlier of how workers related to machines, had spoken of "temporary paroxysms."[2] This adrenaline, this surge of expectant energy that is felt when human subject and machine take each other on, is worth dwelling on because it is in excess of the protocols and rewards described by the narrative of consumption usually used to explain the arrival of the automobile and its phenomenally eager acceptance. The rate at which the car was taken up is spectacular: in 1907, about 62,000 cars were built worldwide; by 1913, the figure had climbed to 606,124.[3] The Ford Model T began production in 1908, at the point where the possibility for workers to own their own cars was only beginning. The story is most often told as a narrative of brilliant technological advances by individual inventors. The work of these innovators—Benz in Berlin with his first motor-engine of 1885, a 0.8 horsepower, one-cylinder engine used to power a tricycle; John Boyd Dunlop with the vital component of smooth driving, the pneumatic tire of 1888; and the Michelin brothers in Paris, who first fitted an automobile with such tires—all formed a chain of developments that put cars on the streets of the world.[4] A succession of advances by intrepid pioneers, cash-rich investors, and canny mechanics who be-

came race car drivers and, if lucky, car manufacturers makes for a tale with at least some of the trappings of the narratives of physical endurance and derring-do that were replacing adventure fiction in this period. To understand why (rather than simply how) this new speed machine became such a vivid component in the imaginative lives of people in a few years, so much so that it invaded the domain of their sexual lives and their very sense of what constituted human energy itself, we need to probe motivations rather than chart intentions.

Car Culture: Experience Trumps Consumption

Histories of early automobile production generally describe the rise of car ownership as central to the rise of mass consumer culture in the West in this period. The turn of the century witnessed the greatest of the great exhibitions (the Exposition Universelle in Paris, visited by fifty-one million people, opened in 1900),[5] the full flowering of department stores (Louis Sullivan's Schlesinger Mayer, later Carson Pirie Scott, department store was built in Chicago between 1899 and 1904),[6] new leisure time for workers, and a new level of disposable income even for some members of the working class. In this commodity carnival, the car became the most coveted consumer disposable of all. In the history of mass consumption, desire for this ur-commodity was stoked by a legion of new accounts of businessman heroism, super-endurance, and tough tactics. Henry Ford in particular was cast as a near-mythic figure. These tales of discovery, clever improvisation, and deft entrepreneurship worked as advertising for this new, soon-to-be-mass-produced product in part because they were reconditioned versions of late Victorian adventure tales. Endurance races across France, America, and the Sahara and lavish car shows were early innovations in this highly managed branch of consumerism. From the start, the car industry was about innovations in mass publicity almost as much as innovations in technology. The antics of the Paris-Madrid race, the Circuit des Ardennes, and the Gordon Bennett Cup were celebrated in newspaper dramas, offering free publicity for car companies and feverishly cast as adventure. The reading of car culture as the golden calf of early-twentieth-century consumerism, however, does not necessarily explain why the car, with its speed possibilities, came to stand out so dramatically among the mass of consumable goods available.

The car is a singular kind of consumer commodity: it is not merely an

inert object, as conventional accounts of commodity fetishism imply that the commodity must be. Certainly, the car's value as a spectacular commodity—one that, once merely seen, is instantly desired—was enhanced by good design, a high-gloss body, and fine accouterments from brass and glass to chrome; as a static commodity, it was granted more glamour than almost any other. However, the car is primarily a machine, in which, it appeared, the act of consumption itself could be exceeded when the car was used to experience the new thrill of independent speed. Speed culture, the access to the adrenaline-inducing rush that twists the faces of the couple in the Frank photograph, does not quite fit with the notion of hapless consumerism that the usual accounts of the protocols and harnessed desires of late Victorian and early modern consumption would lead one to expect. Rather, it challenges and contests the model of a largely passive consuming subject.

Accounts of early consumer culture, especially as they relate to literature, have been deeply indebted to Guy Debord's account of the "society of the spectacle,"[7] as well as to Jean Baudrillard's even-better-known discussion of simulation in modern culture. Histories of consumerism have delineated its seductive mirage effects, the empty promises of happiness and personal fulfillment it holds out through advertising or through the simple display of the mysterious, glamorous commodities themselves. Baudrillard's notoriously apocalyptic account carries this much further, so that, as he puts it in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*:

> The end of spectacle brings with it the collapse of reality into hyperrealism, the meticulous repudiation of the real, preferably through another reproductive medium such as advertising or photography. Through reproduction from one medium to another the real becomes volatile, it becomes the allegory of death . . . a fetishization of the lost object which is no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of the degeneration and its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal.[8]

This description of a receding hall of phantasmal hyper-spectacles sums up what most accounts of early consumerism imply. There have been attempts to counter this deeply pessimistic vision, as in Jennifer Wicke's account of the "work of consumption" that is done, she claims, by women as consumers.[9] Such accounts nevertheless leave the overall conception of consumer culture as a mirage intact. Most of this writing is, in turn, indebted to Marx's totalizing account of commodity fetishism in the opening

chapters of *Capital* ("A commodity is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties").[10] However, precisely because these Victorian origins of both consumer culture and the critical apparatus to analyze it focus on the act of consumption as the analogy of the act of looking at a spectacle, they consider it a static behavior, a tragic event where the spectator-consumer is fooled in his obeisance to a static commodity as spectacle. By the early twentieth century, however, new forces were arising to render this model more complex. Symptomatic of such changes was the new car culture.

We have seen that a change in late Victorian Western culture's conception of space was one key cultural shift related to the rise of speed culture for the masses. Nationalism at home and imperialism (or, for the United States, westerly expansion) were dominant ideologies; the dualist spatial ideologeme of home and heterotopia underpinned the representation of space in the West's cultural productions. Perhaps the greatest cultural innovations of the high Victorian era, however, were the wiles, delights, and oppressions that made up popular consumerism. The model of this consumerism developed by the Victorians, based on fetishization and a passive attitude before the spectacle of the commodity, fitted perfectly with the dualist envisioning of space fundamental to the national-imperial cultural imaginary. Both "home versus heterotopia" conceptions of space and "fetish of the commodity" models of consumerism cast the object to be known as essentially static, and the act of knowing as, first, the accurate measurement of the distance between fixed observer and object and, second, its takeover—as colony, as object to be known completely, or as purchased commodity. As Marx put it, in this vein, "Commodities are things, and therefore lack the power to resist man. If they are unwilling, he can use force; in other words, he can take possession of them."[11] This is consumption described by analogy to imperialism. We have seen in the previous chapter how, in the fin de siècle, this dualist system of imagining space broke down, and traced this to the moment of realization that the world was now completely mapped. This breakdown was evidenced in the new anxiety about home in the detective and thriller fiction that burgeoned as new literary (and subliterary) genres of the period; it gave way to frustration over slowness in modernist literature after Conrad. At this same moment, the masses were being given corresponding kinds of new mass-culture thrills—as in Houdini's escape spectacles, or the roller-coaster fairground ride. Did a similar

breakdown take place in relation to the relatively new protocols of consumer desire and consumption? I suggest that it did so. Just as the realization of the possible end of the age of empire diverted cultural imaginings from what was to be found at the end of the voyage (home or heterotopia) to the actual modalities of experience (at speed) of the journey itself, so too the dawn of the new moment of truly mass consumption meant that the static pleasures of gullible fetishization would not suffice as the sine qua non of consumer pleasure. It was not, however, that fetishization as such was superseded; it survives still as the prime consumer behavior. Rather, it now came to coexist alongside a new improvising logic of personal pleasure that was the logical extension of the consumerist imperative. Of this new logic, the car's speed culture was the first and prime example.

The new technology of the automobile, once masses of people became drivers, made such improvisation for personal pleasure inevitable. Spectacle, the image of the fetish that governed the protocol of the original passive consumerism, is a late moment in the history of iconicity. It was with the invention of the camera that the hold of the upper classes on pictoralism — the ability to coin images — was loosened. Spectacle (as it came in the early twentieth century to replace wordiness in advertising) may then be read as the rear-guard action of those in power to reclaim their hold on the image as a way to awe the masses, a power that they had lost with the invention of mass photography. The new speed and independence of the automobile, however, granted a new power — and a new capacity for personal pleasure — and it went into the hands of masses of people almost at once. In this lay its striking potential as a tool to improvise new ways of relating to the world. This speed — this ability to move rapidly and at will with the new technology of the automobile — was among the first of a series of new personal empowerments made possible by major new technologies — mass electrification provided another — to be granted to the masses directly. The car's allure, and the basis for car culture, was twofold: on the one hand, it was the ultimate commodity of the new mass consumerism that was offered to its customers using the full panoply of commodity spectacle under which consumerism operated; on the other, it was wholly new, a commodity that superseded all of Marx's intuitions about how a commodity's mystical character resides in its congealment of the labor power used to produce it, because it engendered in its consumers effects far beyond the usual run of commodity pleasures and suggested to them a range of behaviors, plea-

sures, and freedoms which they had hardly intuited before. The car was a radically hybrid commodity: its use value, as it turned out, far from being superseded or obscured by its exchange value, rather, complemented it. While still implicating use in its glamour, it made "use" itself into a complex of experiences which the consumer had not known she had desired.

We can see this division mirrored in, for example, the two directions taken in early automobile production: the craftsmanlike building of svelte, luxuriously made cars for the rich, who sat in them merely as passengers, as if the car were a private train, and the soon-streamlined mass-production of rattly, clanking cars for ordinary people, who did drive them, and for whom the experience of driving was to be as bumpy, and as *felt*, as possible. The first tendency led to the Hispano-Souza and the Rolls Royce, the second, to the Citroën, the Morris, and the Ford Model T. It can be seen too in the different attitudes to cars evidenced in texts from highbrow, as opposed to lowbrow, culture: modernist authors, such as Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*, seem nervous of the car and its "pistol-shot" noises, while popular forms, from the funfair to the *Boy's Own* annuals to silent cinema, take to the car enthusiastically as speedy, lively, useful, and often hilarious. In the cinema, the car and the idea of speed were sold to the masses as nonstop excitement; the car's new pleasure, beyond use value, was enthusiastically explored on film. (It was as if, in the movie car chase, even photographed speed could energize the medium representing it.) The early history of car buying emerges as a double narrative: first, with the emphasis on style, luxury, snobbery, and spectacle, the car was advertised as the ultimate commodity; underlying this was a (counter)current, scripted only as it emerged, of the car as speed machine that offered the greatest thrills not in its appearance but in its use. It is this challenging, not-quite-scripted effect, an effect in excess of the pleasure of the commodity form itself, even as the automobile was doing duty as the commodity's supreme example, that can be code-named "adrenaline." We can chart the struggle of this effect to operate despite, or in tandem with, the car's status as static commodity.

Speed Experience versus Consumer Desire: First Steps

Charles Dickens, if he had been born fifty years later, might, with his energetic, dynamic prose, have been the supreme novelist of the motorcar: he was famous as a young writer for composing some of *The Pickwick Papers*

while seated in a moving stagecoach, and, at the time of writing *Our Mutual Friend*, was deeply traumatized by his involvement in the Staplehurst railway accident, in which ten people were killed and many injured.[12] By the 1890s, however, the anxiety of much high literary production to distance itself from the rising tide of mass-market railway novels and a litter of commuter writing manifested itself not only in little overt concern for new technologies in such texts but more fundamentally in a textual pace that was itself slow, contemplative, and anything but geared to speed. It is in such works, by Thomas Hardy and Henry James, for example, that when speed is granted an entree, it is analyzed with all the caution and, mostly, disapproval that suggests a fear of what is to come mixed with an awe at its prospects. In high literature of the twentieth century, speed, when it was regarded at all by serious writing, was treated with an almost puritan suspicion.

Prim disapproval riven by fascination, for example, sets the tone of Hardy in an intriguing scene in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* about the sexual thrills and physical terrors of a racing dogcart. *Tess* was first published in *The Graphic* between July and December 1891, four years before the earliest commercial production of the motorcar, at a time when the speed limits for motorized vehicles on public roads in Britain was, under the 1865 Red Flag Act, still four miles per hour. (Moreover, a person carrying a red flag was supposed to walk before the vehicle. This rule was dropped, and the limit increased to fourteen miles an hour, by the Locomotives and Highways Act of 1896.) In chapter 7 of "The Maiden," the novel's first section, Hardy describes how the teenage and gullible Tess tries not to be frightened by the cad Alec d'Urberville, who drives her downhill at full speed in his dogcart. It is a passage that already, in 1891, contains all the elements of desire, fear, power-playing, and the relation of speed and sexuality that are at work in Robert Frank's photo of the lovers in Dodgem car bliss sixty years later. What for Frank's lovers in the photo is excitement at the use of speed was cast by Hardy as terror tactic in a vile seduction. The speed fiend (Alec) is a corrupt villain; the refusal of the thrill of speed by the lowly heroine (Tess) symbolizes the self-preservation of her sexual innocence. In a chorus of disapproval that would follow the automobile from its earliest days, speed, in advance, stood for a caddish masculinity, its refusal for demure innocence.

Nevertheless Hardy gives us a superb account of the feeling of speed

(surely at more than four miles per hour) that whips up its own erotics of the force of nature and the joy of lack of control:

> Down, down, they sped, the wheels humming like a top, the dog-cart rocking right and left, its axis acquiring a slightly oblique set in relation to the line of progress; the figure of the horse rising and falling in undulations before them. Sometimes a wheel was off the ground, it seemed, for many yards; sometimes a stone was sent spinning over the hedge, and flinty sparks from the horse's hooves outshone the daylight. The fore part of the straight road enlarged with their advance, the two banks dividing like a splitting stick; and one rushed past at each shoulder.[13]

The poetic onomatopoeia of the "s" sounds and the taut countering of abstractions ("axis," "oblique set," "advance") and similes ("like a top," "like a split stick") are not just Hardy's mimeticism-searching impressionism in action; they focus in a brilliant amalgam the basics of a speed discourse *avant la lettre*. Boosters of car driving from Filson Young, author of *The Complete Motorist* (1904), to Henry Ford in his memoirs, as well as reporters writing of the Gordon Bennett Cup, and masses of writers for automobile advertisements, would be recycling such strategies of telling speed's thrills until they seemed very tired indeed in the coming decades. More telling, however, is the narrative which surrounds this evocation. Alec, male driver, wishes to race downhill ("There's nothing like it for raising your spirits"), but Tess is frightened; at the next hill, he promises to slow down if she allows him to kiss her. She veers aside, he threatens to go faster, and she allows him "The kiss of mastery" (56). Her hat flies off, she climbs down to retrieve it and then refuses to remount; in this style, Tess walking, Alec driving slowly, they go the six miles to his mother's house. In this set piece, Hardy presents the use of speed by a male as a means to sexual conquest, the gaining of what he calls sexual mastery. Speed is a weapon of the nouveau riche male seducer; refusing it, Tess, still the pure woman, holds on to her innocence.

Hardy's evocation of speed betrays an interest in its energy and its force as an experience, but speeding is not merely cast as dangerous in itself; it is a torture inflicted by the man upon the woman, the corrupted upon the innocent. Speed here stands for callous male sexual predatoriness, and its pleasures remain for this text unavailable within a puritan moral order. It is shown as a weapon of the rich driver; the account serves as a warning to the poor passenger, to the laboring classes, to beware of it. Consider

the ecstasy of the presumably working-class couple in Frank's photograph sixty years later, bent on enjoying the limited speed thrill of the Dodgem car: the warning implied in Hardy's moralistic vignette was to be ignored or reversed. His canny association of speed and sexuality nevertheless foreshadows what was to become a staple of antispeed discourse, as well as a huge advertisement enticing people to car culture, in the coming century. Hardy is one of the last authors to write about speed before the advent of car technology. He writes before the car became a commodity, and his focus is almost wholly on speed itself, not on the vehicle. Once cars began to be produced, however, the concerns articulated in Hardy's speed scene were exacerbated, caricatured, and debated. Speed and sexuality—as a new subdiscourse of speed and power—were to be thoroughly related. This sexuality at speed could be sold as part of the allure of the car commodity; it could also appear in new versions as part of the experience of speed which might exceed commodity fetishism.

The car's fetish qualities, inevitably, inhered in the car as object. In the first thirty years of car production, it was the curve—of a hood, a fender, a roofline—that became established as the mark of the car as luxury consumer good. The curved car body subsequently came to signify aerodynamics; first, as it was expensive to curve metal and wood, it meant *luxe*. From the first, the making of cars involved not only the construction of a machine but the arrangement of a narrow and (after engines became powerful enough to carry a closed car) enclosed space. The car's space in twentieth-century culture often managed to eclipse and counter the home as site of sexuality, privacy, family gathering, and scene of generational changes. In the same way, the closed car in a real sense became the site of innovation of the most modern steel-and-glass architecture. In the earliest years (1890–1900), while innovations in the engine were still paramount—the modern carburetor, for example, was invented in 1893 by Wilhelm Maybach, the assistant to Gottlieb Daimler[14]—the techno-architecture of the earliest vehicles was awkwardly retrospective: these machines borrowed their contours from the horse-drawn carriage, and their spindly metallic look from the recently popularized bicycle. (One can read these tendencies even in the rich man's car photographed by Lartigue in 1911 [figure 7].) These early efforts used a wooden frame, the legacy of coach building, which continued even with the early Model Ts; this was only superseded when it was found that mass-produced welded metal frames were faster to construct. This frame was complemented with a mass of metal spokes,

FIGURE 7. Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *The Marquis de Soriano in a Gregoire Automobile in the Bois de Boulogne*, 1911. Gelatin silver print, 12 × 16 in. Courtesy of Friends of J.-H. Lartigue, Paris.

handles, engine parts, rails, and steering stick. Through this early arrangement of steel, iron, and glass, early cars conveyed a sense of practicality in mechanic plainness—as in the first Daimler car, of 1886, for example. As production boomed, however—in France there were 300 cars in 1896, 4,800 in 1900, and 16,900 in 1904, the first year in which the United States surpassed France in the number of cars built[15]—two types of car production emerged, one aimed at a small, exclusive market, and the other marked by mass-market plans. It was on the new luxury marques, individually built with bodies molded in the coach-building tradition, that the curved metal of the outer skin became the key sign of careful, expensive worker-hours and the lavished attention of skilled artisans. At first, these curves were made by bending parts of the wood frame, a time-consuming process; next, they were made of beaten metal, which involved skilled craftsmen working slowly on an expensive product.

It was only in the thirties that this new glamour-imbued, luxe-laden curve

became a feature of built architecture, particularly in seaside and leisure buildings in the style that came to be known as "streamline moderne." By then, car architecture had become an inspiration for a new curvature which builders in concrete could copy. This curvature of the metal shell of the car was associated with increased comfort within. Its finest moment in the earliest stage of luxury car building came with a style known as the Roi de Belge. Also christened the "tulip phaeton," this was associated with the innovation of mounting side doors in front of the rear wheels, in cars with engines powerful enough to carry passengers in a commodious back seat. When the king of Belgium, it was said,[16] complained to the coach builder that the rear seat was too small for his bulk, his mistress Mlle. de Merode proposed a solution: place two large stuffed armchairs side by side there. To accommodate them, the car was given wide, bulbous sides and a rear of double-reversed curves in the shape of a tulip. The bulbous upholstery within was matched by a curvaceous bulbousness without. This became the much-copied style in luxury marques on two continents. In the Roi de Belge, the man who, as proprietor of the Congo, presented Conrad with the raw material for expressing the frustrations of slowness in his treatise-novella, also contributed to the fetish quality of the new technology that rendered the experience of speed luxurious.

The curve, then, which might seem at first suggestive of speed's smoothness, originally represented well-padded luxury as a complement to smooth and soothing technology. It was a new design signifier—with roots in art deco—and was the avatar of, and was probably suggested partly by, some sense of speed's aerodynamism as well. The swoosh of the car through the air meant that one saw it as meteoric—as a point trailing a tail—and this sense of flow the designers incorporated in car bodies with their gently undulating or furiously flowing curves. Already in the Vanderbilt Cup era, cars meant for racing were being built with the low, streamlined look of modern race cars; the Stanley Steamer in which Fred Marriott reached 127 miles per hour in 1906 at Daytona Beach was low, wedge shaped, and little higher than its wheels.[17] The luxury marques paraded their owners' wealth with excess baggage space, which was accommodated beneath the curves; Gatsby's cream-colored Rolls Royce in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, for example, was "bright as a nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns."[18]

Companies known for mass-producing earlier machine commodities

as luxury accessories for bourgeois households become involved in car making, suggesting the sense of the car as luxury commodity prevalent at the time: the Steinway Piano Company, for example, had bought the rights to manufacture Daimler engines as early as 1890, although the company never built cars.[19] That the owners of these cars were invariably rich gave the machines—which flaunted their owners' wealth—cachet: William K. Vanderbilt, for example, was reported to have a hundred-car garage filled with the world's most expensive makes at his Long Island villa, and in 1905, long before five dollars a day was considered a princely wage by a Ford worker on the newly operational assembly line, the most glamorous marques each commanded about $7,500.[20] As these rich buyers came from the leisure class, cars were from the first associated with leisure, with "touring," and with the habits of fashionable "resort" living (the Côte d'Azur, Newport, Long Island, Deauville) richly documented in the novels of Fitzgerald, most of which describe any number of cars, usually as signifiers of their owners' capacity for luxury and conspicuous consumption. This cachet was enhanced and stoked by early automobile shows (one of the first held in the United States, in Madison Square Garden in 1903, attracted the Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, and Astors) and the new habit of parading in one's car on the esplanade or parkway as a new version of the Victorian drive; *Automobile Topics* in 1901 spoke of how "in Atlantic City the automobile parade on the Pacific Avenue Driveway is becoming a daily feature of society."[21] This version of haute car culture was taken up in the earliest representations of cars in film. In one of the very first films, spectators had leaped from their seats at the sight of a speeding train careening toward them; the first cars in film were instead presented demurely as a procession of enviable consumer commodities. *Automobile Parade*, an Edison film of 1900, simply features a series of about ten different car makes as they parade by the camera, which itself is static. With a unique design centered on aerodynamic and luxury-signifying curves, the custom car for the wealthy customer, increasingly longer, wider, and lower in the first decades of the twentieth century, presented itself as the newest, most up-to-date, and most luxurious and ostentatious commodity of all. Underlying this commodity ostentation, nevertheless, was a fascination with the car's new kind of power: independent speed.

The possibilities of speed were illustrated obliquely in the aerodynamics of the car's appearance: they were evoked directly in the discourses about

drivers, races, endurance, and "spills" that also fascinated the largely nonmotoring public in this period. The very clothing deemed necessary in the first open cars—the panoply of goggles, veils, heavy leather or rubber coats, scarves, and gloves (the dancer Isadora Duncan would be killed, gruesomely, when the trailing scarf she wore got caught in the spokes of the taxi in which she was being driven in the south of France in 1927)[22]—all evoked a culture of the outdoors, of facing the elements, and of intrepid adventure. (The car could be enlisted on the side of public health: early debates on automobile use even included newspaper speculation that the car would "clean up" the city, where horse droppings had been a public health issue.) The association of the car as speed machine to adventure was fostered from the first by automobile races, often held over long distances and across national borders. The first such race, organized by the Count de Dion, soon to emerge as a famous car manufacturer, was run from Paris to Bordeaux and back, a distance of 732 miles; the fastest car in the race, driven by another manufacturer, Emile Levassor, covered the course in forty-eight hours and forty-eight minutes, averaging fifteen miles per hour without a single breakdown. Fifteen gasoline-engine cars, six steam cars, and one electric car entered the race; only eight gasoline- and one steam-engine car managed to finish. As Levassor's car was a two-seater and the rules had stipulated that the first four-seater would be the victor, the winner was a Peugeot driven by Koechlin.[23] These dangerous city-to-city runs culminated in the Paris–Madrid race of 1903, when so many accidents occurred, including one in which one of the Renault brothers was killed, that the race was stopped in Bordeaux, where police impounded the cars and they were dragged to the railway station by horses.

Drivers in these races, accompanied by mechanics, roared along dirt roads—in the Paris-Madrid, the winner had covered 342 miles at 65.3 miles per hour—with only rudimentary brakes: burst tires, breakdowns, and crashes were common. The 1903 experience did not stop the most thrilling and global contest of all, the 1908 New York-Paris race from Times Square to the Champs-Élysées via Vladivostok and Manchuria, won by an American car, the Thomas Flyer. Only three cars finished that race. New speed records were always newsworthy. The 100-kilometer-per-hour barrier was overcome by the Belgian Camille Jenatzy, who reached 105.87 kilometers per hour on April 29, 1899, at the Circuit d'Archere, in an electric car named *La Jamais Contente*;[24] seven years later Marriott's *Rocket* broke the 200-

kilometer-per-hour barrier (127.7 mph).[25] By 1939 John Cobb had achieved an average speed of 368.9 miles per hour at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah in the superstreamlined *Railton*.

These contests on the open road were the automobile world's version of the fascination with sports contests in the new era of mass leisure and of sport as mass spectacle. They were also renovated versions of the tales of heroic adventure of the Victorian fin de siècle, presenting intrepid drivers on dangerous courses rather than explorers in the African jungles. The New York newspaper whose best-known sponsorship in the nineteenth century was sending H. M. Stanley to Africa in his hugely publicized search for the "lost" missionary David Livingstone, was, in the new century, the sponsor of the most famous international motor race, the Gordon Bennett Cup. The *New York Times* and *Le Matin* sponsored the New York–Paris race of 1908. Newspaper interest ensured that these races became transatlantic sensations, reported in papers and featured as filmed newsreel attractions in the thriving new medium of the cinema. A surviving short titled *Race for the Vanderbilt Cup* of 1904, for example, displays a panoply of race cars and their drivers from all the contesting nations photographed from a range of camera positions. From the first, cars meant the toughest and most dangerous—and exciting—of adventure sports; in these races, where counts and mechanics sat side by side representing their nations, at least the possibility of novel class alliances was suggested. Directed to a mass audience, this implied that each of its members might have access to this dream of mad adventure at speed.

Reading of these early automobile racers' exploits, one is struck by a new set of almost invariably male class allegiances that were forged in bringing the first cars onto the public roads and into the public eye: a mixture of often nouveau riche businessmen, arriviste aristocrats with money (de Dion), earnest engineers and the heads of factories (Daimler), along with assorted bicycle mechanics, amateur inventors, and hangers-on, who, through shifting deals, lawsuits, concessions, patents, and claims, as well as the mass publicity generated by the cross-nation races, managed to transform the car from a novel invention into a mass-produced commodity. This milieu is summed up cynically by none other than James Joyce in his story "After the Race," written after Joyce had been a reporter for the Gordon Bennett Cup. This race had to be held in Ireland in 1903, as the speed limit in England of fourteen miles per hour was too constraining.[26] (The race was won by Camille Djinnis in a Mercedes 60.) Joyce's sketch of the socially inept

young Irishman Doyle contrasts him cruelly with the continental members of the "motoring circles" Doyle had encountered during a year in Cambridge. These include drivers in the race who see their business futures in cars:

> Segouin was in a good humour because he had unexpectedly received some orders in advance (he was about to start a motor establishment in Paris) and Riviere was in good humor because he was about to be appointed manager of the establishment.[27]

To represent the world of this new class of technician businessmen and sportsmen, Joyce—contemptuously—employs the kind of imagery that had been employed by his compatriot George Moore in his naturalistic depictions of horse-racing and betting circles in novels such as *Esther Waters*. Joyce, however, reserves his greatest contempt for the proletarian spectators who line the final miles of the route: these viewers of speed, enthusing by the roadside along which "the Continent sped its wealth and industry . . . Now and again . . . raised the cheer of the gratefully oppressed" (42). Doyle, as the go-between who is out of place amid both watchers and the racers, humiliates himself when, later that evening, he loses his money to the racers at cards. Joyce's story was first published in December 1904;[28] it was finally published in book form in *Dubliners* in 1916, when its author was long resident in Trieste. Unlike the Futurists writing in Italy in and after 1909, Joyce shows no interest in the speed of the cars as such; rather, this is a tale of class resentments, in which the spectacle of the terrific new speeds acts merely to exacerbate the sense of anger the narrator feels watching the foolish enthusiasm of the oppressed poor. Nevertheless there is an implied if muted respect here for that group of racer businessmen as a new international class to whose brand of hard-bitten glamour neither the spectators nor the hapless Doyle can aspire.

The rumblings of class resentment at these spectacles, first of the rich parading in the ostentatious symbols of their money, and then of rich adventurers, along with their humbler mechanics, racing each other on public roads, were choreographed by the new mass-circulation newspapers as an interplay of Luddite caution and whetted desire. An outcry about the dangers of the road races, especially in custom-built racers such as the Mercedes 60, which won the Gordon Bennett Cup in 1903, led to the discrediting of the long endurance races and the rise of Grand Prix racing over more restricted courses (Le Mans in France, Daytona in the United States) after

1906. Soon these were being raced in lower horsepower and much smaller "voiturettes," paving the way for modern car races on specially built tracks. Brooklands racetrack in Britain, with its extraordinary gradients suggesting the necessity for the curve in new roads as well as in car design itself, opened in 1907; the first Indianapolis 500 was held in 1911. Rich speeders in modern cities caused outcries, especially when they caused accidents and hit pedestrians: Mrs. Bridget Driscoll, crossing the street, was the first recorded fatality, hit by a car at Crystal Palace in South London in August 1896.[29] *The Horseless Age*, the first U.S. auto periodical, reported in summer 1904 that cars driving through working-class neighborhoods were so harassed by stone throwing that the drivers demanded police protection. Such incidents famously led President Woodrow Wilson to declare that the invention of the automobile was the greatest incitement of the poor to socialism, so great would be their envy of the cars of the rich.

The spectacle of speed—and the prospect of actually experiencing it—was, however, also held out to mass audiences. W. K. Vanderbilt himself enjoyed racing his red automobile through the streets of New York, with the police (for he broke the speed limit) in futile pursuit: such exploits by rich drivers were the origins of one of the most characteristic twentieth-century narratives, the car chase. A sensational automobile run in the United States in 1899, from Cleveland to New York in a journey that took forty-eight hours, was watched by almost a million spectators: it has been credited with introducing the automobile as a commodity purchasable by the public to U.S. consumers.[30] The Vanderbilt Cup, filmed in its inaugural run in 1904, attracted half a million spectators in 1906; it became such a popular feature of the years before World War I that it was the basis for a Broadway musical *The Vanderbilt Cup Race*, in which the champion driver Barney Oldfield drove a Peerless Green Dragon onstage.[31] While such spectacles of mechanical endurance were presumed to enthrall the masses—as in the crossing of the American continent by a Vermont physician, D. H. Nelson Jackson, and his chauffeur, Sewall K. Croker, in sixty-three days in 1903—the cinema continued to stoke its audiences' interest in the experience of riding in automobiles. In the "Tim Hurst Tours," for example, the audience sat in a theater that resembled the interior of a touring car and watched films that had been photographed from a real car window along the great streets of the world's cities.[32] Class resentments about the ostentatious display of wealth by the rich in their access to speed were drowned by popular discourses and streams of images harnessing people's fascination not just with

flashy commodities but more with their power to cover distances at terrific and enduring speeds. Woodrow Wilson could claim that the spectacle of idle rich "automobilists" spread socialism; the popular media, in retort, fed the popular fascination with speed. More, they lured with the dream that driving would soon be within everyone's reach.

While these opulent, superelegant cars for the rich paraded their aura of the most desirable of new commodities, as well as their role as engines for new experiences of endurance and speed, makers were also imagining more lowly—and enjoyable—cars for the people. Already in 1895 the French automobile manufacturer de Dion-Bouton had attached a 2.75 horsepower, forty-pound engine to a tricycle: fifteen thousand of these were sold in the following five years, even at a price (3,900 francs) that was about double the average annual wage in the United States at that time. These engines were used by companies such as Renault in France, Humber in England, Opel in Germany, and Packard in the United States;[33] the "bicycle boom" soon turned into the motor boom, and bicycle manufacturers such as Harry T. Lawson in Britain rushed into car production. But it was in the U.S. Midwest that forms of mass production enjoyed vast successes: Ransom Olds with the curved-dash Oldsmobile of 1901 (650 cars sold for $650 dollars each that year) was swiftly followed by Cadillac, Buick (the "Nifty," Model 10), and then Ford's Model N.[34] Between 1900 and 1908, 485 companies began manufacturing cars in the United States. Then, in October 1908, Henry Ford made the car a real mass-consumable commodity when he introduced the Model T. Two years and three months to the day later, the opening of the Highland Park assembly line matched mass production to mass consumption. In 1908 the Model T cost $825 for the "Runabout," $850 for the "Touring Car"; in 1912 the Runabout, offered at $575, first dropped below the average annual wage in the United States. By 1916 the Runabout cost $343, and the touring car $360. As America entered World War I, Ford was building three-quarters of a million cars a year; by 1927, when production ceased, sales not only in the United States but all over the world, particularly in Europe and throughout the British Commonwealth, exceeded fifteen million. By then, the coupe sold for $290. In 1906, 1,708 cars were sold in the United States, by 1929, there were over twenty million cars on the roads of America.[35] Mass motorization, beginning in the United States in the pre–World War I years and catching up in Europe in the twenties and thirties with the Morris Oxford (1913) and the Austin Seven (1922) in Britain, the Peugeot Bébé (1912) designed by an avant-garde painter turned car

designer, Ettore Bugatti, in France, and Hitler's notorious call, in 1934, for the mass motorization of Germany with the Volkswagen, was well in place before World War II.

The design of these cheaper mass-market cars focused much more on the experience of driving, and on the effort demanded of the driver, than on the outward appearance of the car as a consumer commodity. The Model T, for example, was lighter and tougher than luxury cars partly because it used new vanadium steel, pioneered in French racing cars: the turn to what car advertisers termed "performance," and away from the beauty of the commodity object, meant that the appeal to the buyers centered on the power of the engine, the speeds the car could attain, and its durability in attaining them. The Model T had a new three-point motor suspension, improved arc springs, enclosed transmission, and a detachable cylinder head. It had four cylinders, twenty horsepower, a hundred-inch wheelbase, and weighed 1,200 pounds; its ratio of weight to power was much better than any predecessor, and with its high-bore engine, it was a flexible negotiator of bad roads and gradients, required less gear shifting, could take much abuse, and was relatively easy to repair.[36] At the same time, it was relatively noisy, clanking and rattling: one joke had it that "when my Ford is running at 5 mph, the fender rattles, twelve miles an hour my teeth rattle, and 15 mph the transmission drops out."[37] This resulted from the not overly neat joinings and rivetings of the many metal pieces, as well as from engine noise; drumming on the potholed roads, the Model T sounded as tinny as it appeared. In further contrast to the richly varnished colors of the luxury cars, in a final cost-cutting measure, all the early Model T cars were coated in black enamel. (One of the more famous observations attributed to Ford: "Any customer can have a car painted any color he wants as long as it is black.")[38] Commodity aesthetics were forgone in this, the grandest commodity, in favor of savings, and the focus was kept firmly on the driving experience itself.

Or rather, what the first mass-produced cars represent is an ultramodern—and ultramodernist—phenomenon: perhaps for the first time (following the bicycle, here as in other ways a harbinger) the deployment of machine aesthetics in a consumer commodity. This car would be a machine for "experiencing in," as opposed to merely living in, and form would resolutely follow function, even if this entailed exposed machine parts, openly visible metal seams, a perceived awkwardness in the overall proportions, and a sacrifice of comfort to performance. Some historians of the early

days of motor production, such as David Gartman, are apt to criticize the Model T and its ilk as ugly: "a drab dreary machine devoid of decoration to relieve the monotonous expanses of metal . . . [on which] the high flat roof with straight pillars make[s] the car look particularly clumsy."[39] He sees this ugliness as the all-too-visible evidence of the dehumanizing work on the assembly lines that produced such cars, where "detail workers" made or assembled separate parts of the machine without any vision of the whole. Such judgments are dubious, however, because the aesthetic standards to which they appeal are those of the curving lines of the vastly more expensive custom-made cars. Cars such as the Model T were cheap; they were common; but their disjointed, loose-limbed, spindly, or stubby appearance was a glorification of the object's status as truly popular machine.

In the 1914 Model T Touring, for example, this machine quality is expressed in features such as the uncompromising height of the mudguards above the wheel, the length of the steering stick, the exposed suspension beneath the engine, and the ostentatiously stark arrangement of the four unwieldy lamps jutting out from the bonnet. Such motorcar designs represent a key moment in twentieth-century machine aesthetics, which would see its flowering in the steel-and-glass architecture of the sixties and seventies that flaunted its mechanical innards. In the first year of World War I, such goggle-eyed, metal-rod design, a crisscross of metal parts, bespoke the buyer-owner's decision to engage this new machine in an act of hard driving at speed. The owner could glory in the toughness of the machine and the difficulties of managing it. The Model T would most commonly be referred to as a workhorse, with jokes about the Tin Lizzies' clanks, noises, and limited powers. The aura that developed about this particular commodity, then, was one that stressed how luxury had been forgone in favor of hard work, contact with an actual machine, and exposure to a real experience of driving. (Some of the luxury cars were driven by their owners, but their prestige lay with remoteness from any driving experience—that was left to the chauffeur.) This car had to be driven hard, and it was not comfortable: an ethos of rugged contact with real experience by means of the machine underpinned the first mass-market cars sold to the consuming public. The public proved thoroughly susceptible to this message: Ford's commercial empire, and the industries associated with it, such as oil and rubber, enjoyed such phenomenal growth in these years that they enabled the United States to become the dominant commercial power in the world. The automobile, it has been claimed, not only made America mobile but

also powered the industrial expansion that made the United States the world's prime industrial power.[40]

The cheaper cars' underdog machine aesthetics, then, corresponded to the disjointed nature of their assembly line production, but they also represented the purchaser's decision to counter the pallid monotony of his or her work life on such assembly lines with a vivid, visceral experience of driving a hard-biting machine. The machines in the factory could enslave you; these commodity machines, on the contrary, held in their stark machine quality the possibility, it was suggested, of making you free. In Henry Ford's argumentative biography *My Life and Work*, published as early as 1910, he speaks knowingly of "the terror of the machine"; he is referring, however, not to the cars his workers made but to the arguments, which he attempts to counter, that repetitive work on his assembly lines producing those cars is demeaning, dulling, and counter to the desires of any reasonable worker. Take Ford's catalog of the potentially dulling features of assembly line work; imagine their opposites; a list of the pleasures of driving is what emerges. Ford insists:

> The average worker, I'm sorry to say, wants a job to which he doesn't have to put forth much physical exertion—above all he wants a job in which he does not have to think. . . . I have not been able to discover that repetitive labor injures a man in any way. I have been told by parlor experts that repetitive labor is soul as well as body-destroying, but this has not been the result of our investigations.[41]

The car driver—and Ford is quoted as expressing wonder at the idea that "our very own workers will buy automobiles from us"[42]—appeared to want from driving the opposite qualities to those Ford describes in the earlier quote: an experience in which the worker was prepared to exert himself forcefully, where he was called to make constant snap decisions about everything from braking to changing gears, where alertness was constantly demanded, in view of the ever-changing road conditions, obstacles, traffic, weather, and other drivers. There is repetition in driving, but it is always repetition with a difference: every time the driver accelerates, it is a slightly different experience. Decisions about acceleration, braking, speed, and direction are all made the responsibility of the driver. Driving at speed, then, becomes an experience opposite to that of work in the Fordist factory. Ford himself is only occasionally good at describing this experience of driving; more often he speaks sunnily of the car's benefit of allowing families to

enjoy the leisure of a country picnic. Yet the way in which his list of the possible drawbacks of the monotony of assembly work — which he defends — uncannily reverses precisely those pleasures which the purchasers of his cars seemed to seek opens this possibility: these buyers were seeking, through driving, precisely to reverse the monotony of their Fordist working lives.

It is just such a concept of "therapeutic leisure" that is advanced by materialist historians to account for the rise of "leisure industries" in this period. This notion, in a manner different from standard accounts of consumerism and commodity fetishism, attributes to the worker-consumer and leisure pursuer a modicum of autonomous will: the increasingly put-upon worker seizes upon country drives, team sports, and hobbies to salve mind and body abstracted by the Fordist workplace. Note, however, that it is a poor kind of autonomy: in this schema self-directed action is permissible if the subject is deemed to be making up for a lack which only the theorist truly perceives. If the worker subject fully understood his position, the implication runs, then he would surely relinquish the dehumanizing work itself rather than attempt to compensate for it in restorative leisure. In this account, the modern worker is engaged in a desperate to-and-fro struggle with the capitalist machines: dehumanized by them each weekday at work, he counters their ill effects by driving off in the leisure machine, the motorcar, on "free" weekends. The early boosters of mass car sales, notably celebrity bosses such as Ford himself, and the rabid new industry of car advertising, the auto magazines, and even a mass of new travel accounts happily touting "motor-tours" — Edith Wharton's *A Motor-Flight through France* (1909), condensed like many such books from an earlier series of magazine articles, is a good early example — all employed versions of this logic. In various tonalities, it became their guiding rhetoric and the organizing trope of their wonder narratives about the motorcar. For workers as drivers, as the Lynds' research in Muncie, Indiana, for example, showed, the association of car and "Sunday outing" was important to their sense of automobile ownership. (This same ritual would become a staple of petit-bourgeois everyday life in Europe after World War II, to be bitterly satirized in Godard's crash-and-burn film of 1972, *Weekend*, and even more comprehensively in Jacques Tati's madcap *Traffic*. In *Traffic*, mechanics on a weekend outing to an auto show cannot get service at roadside garages because everyone is watching on television the bobbing car of the ultimate twentieth-century Sunday picnic outing, the first landing on the moon.)

The notion of therapeutic leisure, while valid, accounts for only part of the attraction and aura of the car for the ordinary purchaser, just as the glamour of the car as rich person's consumer commodity par excellence does not quite account for it either. What this rattling, hard-driving car offers is an intensive experience of driving. Offering a new and intense experience, the car was the most important example of a series of commodities (the bicycle had led the way) which sold themselves as a means of escape both from the facile pleasures of mindless work in factory or office, performed for others, and from cheap consumption of products made en masse. This was not just therapeutic or compensatory but a search for action, for new experiences. Machines as commodities—Singer sewing machines, Steinway pianos, Raleigh bicycles, Ford cars—twisted the standard consumerist imperative because the commodity promised that commodification would be overcome. No wonder that, intuiting the value in this commodity machine, architects such as Le Corbusier soon valorized the machine as the means for recovering social values and beauty itself. This intuition also underpins the hyperbolic manifestoes of the Futurists in their boosterism of kinesis and the modern machinery that propels it.

What the car and its forerunner, the bicycle, achieved, in the era of consumerist simulation and monotonous work, was to make velocity, in itself a form of unproductive expenditure, the sign of a life lived more intensely. Henry Ford's assembly line had been set up precisely to produce cars *faster*: this kind of speed reduced costs, made more cars in the same amount of time, and thereby made for bigger profits. This assembly line speed, its proponents preached, was achieved by bringing machines to the aid of workers; the workers were merely organized more efficiently in conjunction with the welding, panel-beating, and paint-spraying machines, so that they themselves did not necessarily each have to work faster. Ford himself is keen to stress that for many of his workers, "no muscular energy is required."[43] Car driving did not require much muscular energy either, but it required constant mental and even emotional alertness and nervous expenditure. Such expenditure was best savored when it was in excess of any social need. True, doctors and then farmers were among the first groups to buy mass-produced cars in the U.S. Midwest: doctors to go on their rounds, farmers to travel to market towns. Commuting from the suburbs to work, which the car, after the tramways, made possible, soon became the principal journey of most drivers. Nevertheless the pleasure offered by the car in driving went beyond its use value, into the realm of privately and intensely experienced

surges of energy and alertness that were absolutely excessive of any social need. The power to speed along the highway, in any direction one chooses, is a limited one, but it offered the opportunity for a time at least to escape the shallow pleasures of buying commodities and the dreariness of working under orders. In other words, in increasingly controlled lives, it presented technology as the agent of excess.

Further, this seizing of a limited opportunity to engage in excessive private behavior (with public consequences) was not planned by the first car builders—in the way, for example, as has been claimed more recently, that car designers arrange for the machine's "planned obsolescence"—but rather was an expression of a need which seized upon the automobile once it was offered for sale, and to which sellers of the car soon catered. That the pleasure of driving at speed was formulated by the drivers themselves, that it was articulated *from below* rather than foisted via advertising or propaganda from above, is shown by the almost uncanny way in which comedy was associated with popular accounts of driving from the beginning. We saw the laughter in the eyes of the woman in the Dodgem car in Frank's photograph: this approach to driving and speeding has always characterized popular versions. The Model T, dubbed the Tin Lizzie, was the butt of countless jokes about its rough-and-tumble dependability, jokes which made it all the more beloved. Such popular, easy comedy itself hints at this object's significance as somehow excessive. As we saw earlier, many of the earliest popular experiences of technologized speed, such as the Coney Island roller coasters, had occurred in the comic, excessive, and proletarian carnival of the funfair. The funfair, the working masses' version of earlier holiday carnivals, gradually became focused on rides and speed as the nineteenth century progressed. Starting with the revolving carousel in the 1860s, the spectacles, such as freak shows, and the tests of skill, such as rifle ranges, were gradually marginalized in favor of rides that culminated in the roller coaster and the Dodgem car. The origin of the mass delight in speed at the funfair also hints that the popular use of speed would relate to its possibilities for excess. Having begun in a jokey, carousing atmosphere of holiday, the speed experience would keep a residue of the comedy in its origins.

Nowhere was the comedy at the heart of speed's thrill more enthusiastically celebrated, drawn out as spectacle, and teased into farcical narratives than in the new invention that came to replace the funfair as popular entertainment in the era of consumerist simulation and became wildly popular at

the same moment as the motorcar: the movies. Early movies were obsessed with cars: see early film reel vignettes such as the parade of rich cars in 1905, or the newsreels of the Vanderbilt Cup races from 1904 onward. So many early movies not only focus on cars but make speeding cars the basis of their plot changes and linger on scenes of speed as thrilling in itself that it is as if film as a form from the first intuited a connection to automobile travel. In the spatial logistics of the movies, a seated, stationary viewer watches a moving kinetic image; in the logic of driving, a seated, moving driver watches an apparently moving, but actually still, scene; this correspondence meant that early movies became for their audiences an education in the logics of driving, even as they whetted desire for the automobile by explicitly focusing on its pleasures. There are specific correspondences between the form of the medium of film, in the way in which its symbiosis of technology and representation is received by the viewer, and the union of technology and human skill as it is monitored by the driver driving an automobile. Teasing out these correspondences, we can elaborate a taxonomy of the kinds of perception and excitement offered secondhand by watching a film and firsthand by driving a car. I will do this in a moment, examining the kind of early caper film in which the car itself as a glorious machine is featured very much as the star—the fetishized object as kinetic force. First, however, I want to explore how the thrill of driving, and the presence of the motorcar, came to be represented in some of the writing of the period, and how, here too, its presence came to have a profound effect on how writers wrote.

Driving Texts

Film became the dominant narrative medium of the period when the car went from technological breakthrough to mass commodity; fiction slid in importance as a social discourse. It was in two of the fiction genres—first, appropriately, in children's literature, and then, in a mode fast becoming minor because of its limited readership, high or serious fiction—that the car intruded most forcibly. An immensely popular novel for children in the style of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) features a plot that turns on the character Mr. Toad's obsession with the newly invented motorcar; Toad is addicted to the experience of driving. Such unabashed enthusiasm for cars,

comically yet enthusiastically described, was countered by "serious" fiction, where a reticence to come to terms with the new speed technology was evident. As late as 1925, we find Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* singing the swan song of that mainstay of high modernist urban fiction, the flâneur, a resolute pedestrian in the "walking city." In the image of the ominously closed, possibly royal car that haunts the opening of Woolf's novel, she presents us with the intrusion of the forbidding new machine in all its alienating terror.

Car speeds had been invading and altering literary form in texts by the most serious authors for some time, even if they first showed themselves in ephemeral, occasional pieces. Beginning with a reading of Edith Wharton's *A Motor-Flight through France* (1909), one can see how instant views, a succession of scenes, and a generally speeded-up perception render a travel account that, in its fragmentary, scene-upon-scene character, relays to the reader the variety and the thrill of this new kind of "motor tourism." In *The Wind in the Willows* one long section, which transmits the enthusiasm for automobile speed in the early years of the twentieth century, matches car and "character": automobilism could literally drive one insane. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the car, technology as phantom, ominously shadows the flâneuse on the London streets. It forces the novel's reappraisal of the flâneur narrative—the tale strung out as an account of an urban promenade—that had been a staple of modernist literature. It is in the unlikely purlieu of Wharton's protomodernist travel narrative, nevertheless—first published serially in the same year as Grahame's tale for children—that the effect of automobile speed radically invades and begins to transform the very weft of fictional discourse: the accelerated and haphazard new rhythms of observation made possible by the car tour, the surprises, snatched visions and unexpected detours that car tourism offers, make for a fragmented, scattered, even rushed quality in Wharton's narrative. In the coming years, this kind of kinetic prose would be reformulated in further modernist narratives not consciously concerned with travel or technology, at times speeding up the rhythms of modernism.

Grahame's novel is a significant moment in the arrival of speed technology into literature because it shows how a character could be converted to motorcar speed merely by observing it. Early in the novel comes what is perhaps the most brilliant description there exists of the excitement of people on first seeing a speeding car:

> Far behind them they heard a faint warning hum, like the drone of a distant bee. Glancing back, they saw a small cloud of dust, with a dark center of energy, advancing at them at incredible speed, while from out of the dust a faint "Poop-poop!" wailed like an uneasy animal in pain. Hardly regarding it, they turned to resume their conversation, while in an instant (as it seemed) the peaceful scene was changed, and with a blast of wind and a whirl of sound that made them jump for the nearest ditch, it was on them. The "Poop-poop" rang with a brazen shout in their ears, they had a moment's glimpse of an interior of glittering plate glass and rich morocco, and the magnificent motor-car, immense, breath-snatching, passionate, with its pilot tense and hugging at the wheel, possessed all earth and air for a fraction of a second, flung an enveloping cloud of dust that blinded and enwrapped them utterly, and then dwindled to a speck in the far distance, changed back into a droning bee once more.[44]

Clearly here is one of the luxury cars of a rich early motoring enthusiast, a vehicle lined in "rich morocco." This opulence, however, is nothing compared to the excitement of the car's speed as it passes. This speed is portrayed as a force greater than the forces of nature, so great that it is barely perceptible, with the car altering from a "dark center of energy," to a barely seen glitter of glass and tense driver, to, in a moment, a speck on the horizon beyond. A force, nevertheless, which "possessed all earth and air for a fraction of a second," an apocalyptic apparition, omnipotent, whose terrifying speed boggles the powers of perception of observers and, as it turns out, thrills them with its power. The cart in which sit the three observers of this scene is wrecked, the others are furious, but Mr. Toad—comically, as befitted accounts of car culture in many genres—is besotted:

> Glorious, stirring sight! . . . The poetry of motion: The real way to travel! Here today—in next week tomorrow. . . . Oh bliss! . . . . And to think I never *knew*! All those wasted years that lie behind me, I never knew, never even *dreamt*! But *now*—but now that I know, and now that I fully realize! What dust clouds shall spring up before me as I speed on my reckless way! (43–44)

The attraction to speed felt by Toad is presented first as comic infatuation, and soon as an addiction. Mr. Toad of Toad Hall is the rich gentleman of the novel, a paunchy W. K. Vanderbilt of the Thames valley. He can afford

numerous large bright-red motorcars in which he speeds about, he involves himself in "smash-ups," he exasperates the traffic police. When his friends try to restrain him, he grows listless and ill; escaping, he steals a car from an inn yard, is arrested and jailed, escapes, and caps his adventures when, dressed as a washerwoman, he succeeds in again taking the wheel and driving at an insane speed in the very car he had stolen before. All this driving, the mainstay of the plot, is presented in a setting of bucolic Thames-side country; in this nirvana Toad's speed infatuation is reckoned his latest craze. The desire to drive fast is imagined as an addiction, an emotional force and an almost physical need, and the subsequent basis for all of Toad's behavior. It is rendered as a passion which he cannot himself control. This is presented comically; Toad does no real harm to others, and the novel is no parable of rural conservation; it never reaches the point of confronting this techno-addiction with the older way of life represented by the countryside, the slow river, and the homebody natures of the others. In fact, in the novel, the nostalgia for nature and home matches the excitement about speed. Yet because the motorcar adventures are the stuff of much of the drama in the novel, the car has vitality, comedy, surprise, and adventure on its side. Toad's addiction is what renders him purposeful, and this addiction is to speed. Cars at speed take over a text that is cast as a rustic tale, offer it a plot, and explain the actions of the central character. Grahame's novel turns out, in its innocent fascination with the new speed of the automobile, to be offering an intense swan song to narratives about rural peacefulness and homeliness. As such, *The Wind in the Willows*, even as it is fascinated by speed, is also the first major satire of automobile fascination, a minor but forceful genre in subsequent Western fiction that would encompass novels such as the Russian Futurist-expressionist Ilya Ehrenburg's *The Life of the Automobile* and reach a crescendo in 1973 with J. G. Ballard's novel *Crash*. Ballard's psychotic driver Vaughan is the successor to Toad, in a Thames valley now strewn with motorways and lit with a lurid neon glow.

"Serious" fiction of the early twentieth century proved much more circumspect in depicting automobiles and their speeds. Travel books like Evelyn Waugh's *Remote People* (1930), for example, suggest the increasingly blasé attitude toward the automobile; although Waugh details a series of automobile trips over hair-raisingly rutted roads in the mountains around Addis Ababa, he expresses no interest in speed in itself: it has by now become fully and merely functional for the sophisticated, resourceful writer.[45] In American novels by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, and

John Steinbeck, cars of all sorts are described: the focus is generally on the make and marque of the car as a handy signal of the class aspirations and resources of the driver. (In chapter 5, I consider how the car crash works as a trauma in *The Great Gatsby*.) In literary experiments of these years, the car returns as a point of anxiety, a harbinger of urban change which upsets the delicate equilibrium of the city being described. It needles narrative rhythms in books that seem to lack the means necessary to represent it.

In Joyce's *Ulysses* (published in 1921, set in 1904), Leopold Bloom, Dublin pedestrian, is at one point blinded for a moment by the sun reflected off a passing car's windscreen.[46] Critics have noted that this is one of the novel's very few factual errors, for there were no cars in Dublin in 1904. (The city did, however, have a modern system of electric trams, often noted by Bloom, whose noise is celebrated in the opening of the "Aeolus" episode.) That Joyce brought into his novel a car that would in fact not arrive until later in the city, however, might be seen as part of the novel's witty retrospective game of prophecy: when the novel was being written between 1914 and 1921, cars were much less rare in Dublin. If *Ulysses* contains within its panorama a foreboding of the city as it would become, crammed with cars and congested with traffic, then consider also that it implies an elegy-in-advance for the figure on whom urban movement in *Ulysses* and most of the great modernist novels is based: the turn-of-the-century urban pedestrian, the flâneur. This figure, celebrated in Walter Benjamin's *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, is the star in almost all the great modernist fictions, from Mann's *Death in Venice* to Musil's *The Man without Qualities*; the flâneur haunts the works of Franz Kafka and calls, "Let us go then," to open T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock*. Roving the streetscapes of these labyrinthine texts, he epitomizes the anxious and alienated modernist urban subject, and his relentless walking, his veritable dromomania, is the key trope of his nervous, restless refusal to feel at home. In chapter 1 we saw how the new popular forms of the 1890s and later, such as detective fiction, inspired a horror of the home in the new mass readership: for a more highbrow audience, the flâneurs of avant-garde modernist fiction were the counterparts of, and complement to, this same avoidance of the home as haunted, plagued, terrifying. Yet by the 1920s, when many of these texts appeared, the trope of frightening home had lost its novelty in popular writing. The flâneur too, it turned out, was a threatened trope. Perhaps this figure's swan song, in fiction in English at any rate, came in 1925 in a novel which both imitates and conjures with that of Joyce: Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novel an-

nounces flânerie's failure as governing trope of modernist subjectivity with a flâneuse heroine's unnerving vision of that new invader of city streets and transformer of city dwellers and their relations, the motorcar.

It has been argued that the flâneur or flâneuse is in some circumstances a figure potentially at odds with the dominant and newly massified consumer culture, the culture which burgeoned in the years when most of the novels featuring these figures are set.[47] As a wandering, directionless walker, he or she exists at a tangent to the driven, compulsive behavior of the avid consumer. The flâneur was attractive to modernist writers, therefore, as a figure who could be used to explore ways to articulate the countersign to consumerist contentment. This should not blind us, nevertheless, to the ways in which the flâneur was *the* prototypical figure of consumer culture as it had been constructed in the "walking city" of this period. Turn-of-the-century consumerism, like new-century modernist narrative, was constructed as a matter of walking, whether from one plate-glass shop window display to the next or through the panoply of wares in department stores. In the new mass consumerism, the consumer subject was hailed as a stroller who could stop, shop, buy. Distractible walkers, the flâneurs of the modernists, despite their various degrees of anomie, are exhibiting the prototypical behavior of the new era of mass consumption, and their celebrated angst may often be read as a sublimation of consumerist desire. Consumption as window-shopping was cast as an affair of strolling to view the wares of the city. From this it follows that what one might call, literally, the *pace* of a modernist flâneur novel, as well as its tone and concerns, manages to mimic quite accurately the pace—leisured, whimsical, diverted, anxious—which consumerism as pedestrian choosing demands of those who buy. Further, many of the literary strategies used by modernist writers in portraying flâneur figures and their consciousnesses—sudden cuts from one scene to the next, a lively nebulousness and challenging obscurity, an uncertainty about point of view, a refusal to make one unified personality the focus of the narrative—all mirror states, strategies, and attitudes that members of the new consumer masses were expected to adopt for shopping to be a pleasurable and diversified activity.

Consumerism, however, once it took off, was bound to have a history, one that meant that the pedestrian consumer would only constitute a moment in a longer continuum. This initial stage might be thought of as contemporaneous with the moment of the plate-glass window—first used in shop fronts as early as 1860. It was in the final decades of the nineteenth

century and the first decades of the twentieth that consumer behavior in cities was expected to consist chiefly of walking along a shopping street, looking at the wares temptingly displayed behind the plate-glass windows of each shop, and then choosing which to enter and buy. Already other mass-consumer protocols were being developed—as in the idea that people could shop from catalogs, tapped profitably by Sears, Roebuck and Co. in North America and by the Bon Marche in Europe. The arrival of the motorcar in the twentieth century not only choked city streets, making the stroll to window-shop less pleasant; it also accelerated the search for alternative protocols of consumerism. The jaunty, diversified, and fragmented pace of the older flâneur consumerism, which involved a leisurely, if at times anxious, interplay of the stroll and the gaze, provided the template on which flâneur figures could be shown in modernist texts with a similarly playful interplay of the scene, the thought, and then another, different idea; this was now threatened by the very commodity, the car, that was being sold as a prime object of consumer desire. In this sense, the urge to accumulate commodities was overwhelming itself. This conflict, brought out in the clash of flânerie and car culture, is explored in the opening pages of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Just as the appearance of politics in a novel has been described, by Stendhal, as resembling "a pistol shot fired in the middle of a concert," so too the arrival of the motorcar on London's streets in *Mrs. Dalloway* is announced initially as "Oh! a pistol shot in the street outside."[48] In these pages, mostly narrated through the heroine's sensibility, Clarissa Dalloway, upper-crust wife of a member of Parliament and recent convalescent, is shown gaily enjoying her genteel flânerie and shopping expedition on Piccadilly and Bond Street, in London's poshest shopping area. Although there is much refined, witty attention to the modulations of Clarissa's finer feelings—to "the waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved" (9)—and to her nostalgic youthful memories, this is intermingled with a straightforward account of her window-shopping, at Hanchard's bookshop, at an art gallery, before "one roll of tweed in the shop where her father had bought his suits for fifty years; a few pearls, salmon in an icebox" (15). Here the modernist recourse to stream-of-consciousness observations, the flitting from one thought to a slipping, half-adduced, half-reported memory, the reception of impressions, is perfectly matched to the pace of Clarissa as privileged consumer pedestrian; and the sensation of pleasure she receives from the goods in the glossy shop windows is of a piece with the equally

ephemeral pleasures of her memories and present concerns. Into this lightly spun, fragilely balanced idyll—while Clarissa is buying flowers—the car bursts like a pistol shot. It comes as harbinger of all that is ominous. Fittingly for Clarissa's class position, it is a car of extreme luxury, driven by a chauffeur, its windows covered by curtains:

> Passers by who, of course, stopped and stared had just had time to see a face of the very greatest importance against the dove-grey upholstery, before a male hand drew the blind and there was nothing to be seen except a square of dove grey. (19)

Just as the motorcar in Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* emerges as a point of energy from the landscape, Woolf's car here seems to focus the whole energy of the cityscape with itself as still center:

> Everything came to a standstill. The throb of the motor-engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body. The sun became extraordinarily hot because the motor car had stopped outside Mulberry's shop window; old ladies on the tops of omnibuses spread their black parasols; here a green, a red parasol opened with a little pop. Mrs. Dalloway, coming to the window with her arm full of sweet peas, looked out with her little pink face pursed in inquiry. Everyone looked at the motor car. Septimus looked. Boys on bicycles sprang off. Traffic accumulated. And there the motor car stood. (20–21)

It is the first fully dramatic moment in the novel; this is signaled by the first gap in the impressionistic flow of the text, which comes immediately after the pistol shot sound and the florist's apology for it to Mrs. Dalloway. Yet this break, a white space on the page, the rendition through absence of the car's energy-centering stillness, also signifies the text's reticence about representing a milieu focused beyond Mrs. Dalloway herself. To this broader world, the car, as it were, ardently draws the text's attention. What the story suggests is that there is a famous person—a member of the royal family, perhaps, or the prime minister out shopping—concealed in the vehicle, and that the street at once becomes awash in rumors about the identity of this ghost in the machine. In the succeeding pages, we are shown "the motor car with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve" (23) being observed, and inspiring emotions of awe, nationalist loyalty, and even reverence for its presumed occupant in a series of characters who up to now have been, and continue to be, strangers: Septimus and Lucrezia Warren Smith, one

Edgar J. Watkiss, a poor flower-seller named Molly Pratt, rich men at the window of Brook's Club, and a crowd outside the gates of Buckingham Palace. The intrusion of the car, it seems, demands that multiple characters get their moment in the narrative; crucially, this is also the moment when the book's second key persona, the shellshocked veteran Septimus Smith, is first mentioned, when both he and Clarissa, in the first moment after the backfiring shot, look at the car simultaneously. Since the story of how these two sensitive, somewhat disturbed Londoners do not quite meet but how their lives nevertheless do tentatively touch becomes the fragile thread on which hangs much of the novel's narrative, the uncannily still car exists as the sole mediator of the relations between these strangers in the urban crowd.

For Marx the commodity as a fetish mediated and interfered with the real relations between people: here the car (unlike the pearls or the painting which Clarissa has seen in the shop windows) is not itself a commodity for sale—so that the gaze of many different people upon it might possibly (although it does not, in the end) bring people together. The narrative is keen to portray this shared look as a relation built on a shared ideology, in this case of nationalist loyalty, as people assume that the car contains an important national figure. The skeptical joke, then, is that, quite possibly, the car does not carry such a figure; it might, were it not for the spectral hand drawing the blind, even be empty. If so, the car episode becomes a tragicomic one that testifies with grim irony to the hollowness of the iconography by which the ruling elite of a modern, technologized state indoctrinates its subjects and exercises its power, as well as to the gullibility of those it addresses. This irony is underlined, when the most faithful subjects, waiting at Buckingham Palace, miss the car as they are diverted by an airplane overhead, a plane skywriting an advertising slogan which no one can really read. The new tech toys—car and airplane—might appear to have the potential to give the novel a more democratic and broader impetus, to have it attend to a greater cross section of the citizens of the city than a stream-of-consciousness focus would allow, and to grant the potential for them to cross paths as the basis for some kind of community. Rather, they only serve, *Mrs. Dalloway* insists, to further underline the citizens' alienation from each other.

We should not, however, be diverted by the text's cynical account of the hollowness of the state's appeal to its people, for that narrative, suggestive as it is, by no means fully contains the car's effect on and in the text.

Mrs. Dalloway, narrating in the car's slipstream, shows it to be a device that could potentially bring these metropolitan dwellers closer together but instead cements their separateness. The car that arrives with the report of a pistol shot manages to throw the text's representational ambitions wide open: just as it precipitated a series of shocks in the rhythm of city life, the car generates a crisis in the text's confidence in its ability to show modern urban sensibilities in conflict and collusion. Puncturing the rarefied enclosure of Mrs. Dalloway's stream-of-consciousness world, the car shocks the novel into trying to delineate tentative ties and gaping differences in the mass of lives that interact in the city on that day.

Why does the text choose the car as the object with which to announce such a crisis? Since the motifs it represents are backed by the skywriting airplane, the new technologies are featured here as intruding, almost fearful omens. But of what? Up to this point, Clarissa and the text have syncopated the clash and noise of London traffic to the pedestrian and consumerist flânerie that she enjoyed: the car's pistol shot represents the point at which this rush of traffic, of buses and cars, and of anonymous people of all sorts, becomes intolerable, so that it marks the beginning of Clarissa's retreat back into her home. Yet, as we have seen, the novel accepts the challenge of narrating the car's effects; it can only do this, however, by imagining the car's occupant and then implying that the car in fact possibly has no one within. Layering these ironies, the text implicitly reads the car (as, for example, an antinationalist might read a flag) as a hollow symbol, the reverence of which is a foolish delusion. Given that much of what we have heard up to this point is Clarissa's stream of consciousness, we might suspect that this reading is the product merely of her imaginings, so that we could distance ourselves from it. It is as if the novel itself almost begs us to cast it in doubt. To agree that the car is a hollow symbol of the state, when, after all, Clarissa might just as well have thought its occupant was a film star, visiting millionaire, or a mobster out shopping, runs counter to a text now eager to imply that Clarissa (and the other car-gazers) desperately wanted there to be someone in the vehicle. Given this need, they must dream up such a figure rather than come to terms with the car and its culture, even if this is a culture of frightening anonymity, as opposed to, as the novel shows us, a culture of foolishly wishful nationalism. In this rereading, the car becomes the joking allegory of a *deus ex machina*, but one without even the comfort of the controlling figure within.

The empty car is a stark, ghostly, roving, and robotic presence that be-

speaks a profound sense of urban meaninglessness and nullity. It's a premonition of an uncanny trope that would later appear in some urban legends and B horror films: the car racing through the streets without any driver or passengers at all. Woolf's version of the gray, roving, empty car at once joins in all the anti-automobile discourses of the day — on their dangers, the need for speed limits, their evil, in President's Wilson's terms, as symbols of a vastly rich leisure class — and breathtakingly supersedes them. It casts the car, its very luxuriousness shown in tones of gray, as indeed a pistol shot killing off the old order of privileged consumer-driven flânerie over which the urban strollers had some control and from which they might derive a capricious if tenuous pleasure. As Clarissa retreats homeward (to a home that certainly has some of the blanched quality of the drawing room of Conrad's "intended" in *Heart of Darkness*), the first pages of *Mrs. Dalloway* read as an account of the final outing of the flâneuse as shopper. The car scene epitomizes this modernist text's embrace of an anti-automobile rhetoric of the day, but heightened to more thoroughly existential ends. In the simplest materialist terms, this was appropriate, for the car was killing off flânerie in London and beyond in precisely this period. By the late 1920s, the department stores of Los Angeles had begun to move to the suburbs and turn their main entrances away from the street pavements of Wiltshire Boulevard and on to the parking lots behind.[49] The earliest "out-of-town" shopping complexes catering to drivers and disavowing pedestrians were built in California in the 1930s.[50] New protocols of consumerism built around the automobile, beyond the interplay of flânerie and the gaze of the window-shopper who was "just looking," were already being invented. As the narrator in *Mrs. Dalloway* explains:

> The car had gone, but it had left a slight ripple which flowed through the glove shops and the hat shops and tailors' shops on both sides of Bond Street. . . . Choosing a pair of gloves — should they be at the elbow or above it, lemon or pale grey? — ladies stopped; when the sentence was finished something had happened. (25)

The passage invites us to ask what that something was, and the text rushes on to assure us that it was the thought "of the dead; of the flag; of Empire" in this post–World War I decade (25). Perhaps. But behind these thoughts, the "slight ripple" felt as the car, and its novelty, confronts and rushes by the culture of consumption in the old style is the shiver caused by the intimation of that culture's disappearance. What the novel stages in its open-

ing pages is a yoking of flânerie, the modernist *topos* for the exploration of urban subjectivity in all its variety, and consumerism. What it stages, rather wistfully, in its insistence that the car signifies merely nationalism while allowing us to wonder at the adequacy of that analysis, is the demise of flânerie, the most characteristic modernist trope, once it enters into collusion with consumption, the most characteristic behavior of modernist bourgeois culture. The car is the marker of modernist narrative's refusal to align itself with post-flâneur modernity. This demonizes the relatively new (in 1925) machine both as modernity's alienating apotheosis and, because the text shows the car as the machine whose qualities cannot be spoken within the modernist flâneur dispensation, as the point at which radical new protocols of narration must come into play. The car marks the threshold at which Woolf's novel ceases to be expressionist and becomes cubist.

Woolf's flâneuse text, happier to annotate the flâneuse's stream-of-consciousness perceptions than to cross over to other narrative horizons, simply extends, in her portrayal of car culture, this monitoring of consciousness; thus the novel can ironically show it filling diverse minds with a groundless nationalism. It forgoes the chance to dissect the new car culture. This task was taken up in other kinds of texts: the first travel narratives reporting on trips in motorcars, the near-hysterical announcements of the Italian Futurists and their British fellow travelers such as Wyndham Lewis in *Blast*, the more techno-revolutionary utopians among avant-garde artists in Russia — and by Woolf herself in her more audacious novel *Orlando*. The Futurists are a special case; here I want to consider how car culture, once embraced, commandeered the styles and stirred up the perspectives of travel writing. My example: Edith Wharton's collection of travel essays *A Motor-Flight through France*.

Early travel narratives describing motor trips sketch the code of manners for a kind of behavior — mass tourism — that was turning landscape and leisure into consumer commodities. At the same time, they were grasping to represent, in new ways, what they sensed was a new experience — the pleasures of motor travel. Far from fearing the car as a symbol, they are keen to celebrate it as glorious possibility. Eagerly participating in car advertising and propaganda, motor-travel writing was another branch of promotions such as early car shows and the races for the Vanderbilt Cup. It was in accord with propagandists' (such as Henry Ford's) delight at the idea that a car allowed unhealthy city life to be abandoned for therapeutic leisure on country lanes. These books also acted as tourist promotions;

journalist-authors and "bright young things" such as Evelyn Waugh were prepared to write about their travels when subsidized by tour companies. (This commercialism allied them with the burgeoning guidebook industry, one of whose most famous series, the Michelin guides, was published by the French tire company.) As studies of tourism from Dean McCannell's work to that of Pierre Bourdieu make clear, tourism, of perhaps all modern activities, represents the commodification of experience itself.

Tourism stages a thirst for new experiences. Yet it offers these experiences at the cost of always ensuring that they are safely commodified in advance. The tourist paradox is that in tourism's search for exoticism and difference, difference is always cut off at the root. Hawking pre-viewed wonders, travel books are paeans to the most pervasive consumerism that modernity offers—they commodify the landscape as spectacle. The more apparently "adventurous" they render (in advance) their hero-readers' faux adventures, by borrowing the now shopworn trope from fin de siècle tales of derring-do that had already been undercut by, for example, Conrad's desultory ironies, or the more "exotic" their reported discoveries, the more they stand for fetishized commodification; this fetish magic works precisely by convincing the consumer that she has accessed something not merely "purchased" or mundane. The pressures on *A Motor-Flight through France* in these terms are therefore intense: the text is inescapably a tourist brochure in disguise, a catalog of the delights not of specific commodities, and not merely a list of the commodified charms of hamlets, vistas, châteaux, and medieval churches throughout France, but a description of life itself while on holiday as commodified experience—as "lifestyle" rather than any form of unmediated living.

Apart from opening with the point that "the motor car has restored the romance of travel" because it has freed us from the railway's "bondage of fixed hours and the beaten track" (1), Wharton does not belabor the delights of automobilism here. Rather, she exemplifies them in her prose. For this is *fast* writing: skimming, moving smoothly from observation to observation, detail to detail, at times jittery and prone to distraction, always ready to move on and mightily satisfied with its progress. Every guidebook is awash in names and places, but here this tendency to list is exaggerated into a flow: in the countryside, hamlets and towns appear in the distance and disappear behind the car's viewers about every four lines: L'Isle sur Tarn, Rabastens, Albi, Carcassonne, Castres, Narbonne, Nimes . . . When the tourers break

their journey to explore a town, the language and pace of views flashing by, as seen from the automobile, is kept up: it still jumps about trying to keep pace with the authorial eye now trained by the automobile perch to practice the quick look and no more. The piled-on place names and impressions insist that beneath the tourist's joy of looking is the joy of fast moving—and that the writer, and reader, must strain to keep up:

> From Nimes to the Mediterranean the impressions are packed too thick. First the Rhone, with the castles of Tarascon and Beaucaire taunting each other across its Flood, Beaucaire from a steep cliff, Tarascon from the very brink of the river; then, after a short flight through orange orchards and vineyards, the pretty leafy town of Saint Remy on the skirts of the Alpilles; and a mile to the south of Saint Remy, on a chalky ledge of the low mountain chain, the two surviving monuments of the Roman city of Glanum. They are set side by side, the tomb and the triumphal arch, in a circular grassy space enclosed with olive orchards and backed by delicate fretted peaks: not another vestige of Roman construction left to connect them with the past. Was it, one wonders, their singular beauty that saved them, that held even the Visigoth's hands. . . . ? (125)

This is writing that is out of breath, writing energized by the pleasure of the fast and definite look that names, notes, and moves on; it is writing on adrenaline. It offers deft impressions, no more. There are observations but no contemplation. Compare this to Clarissa Dalloway's rhythmic, jazzy, but pedestrian reverie sixteen years later. In Wharton's travelogue the progress is transformed by the presence of the new machine, the motorcar. The car, as toy of rich people, plays perfectly to the consumerist trajectory of the travel book; its shimmer as luxury accessory enhances the holiday's snob appeal. That the characters are touring in a motorcar radically alters the tempo of the text. Rather than juxtaposing a steady and tempered succession of sights with reflections on each, as does the early flâneur passage in *Mrs. Dalloway* (in doing this, Woolf's novel owes more to the model of the tourist gaze implied in John Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, for example, than it does to travel writing like that of *A Motor-Flight*), Wharton gives us a torrent of sights in fast succession, a swift series of scene changes and a text where we must always be prepared for surprises. Yet these surprises are all within a narrow range of the types expected in travel writing: notable ruins, quaint churches, jagged and fretted mountain ridges. No real alterity gets

spotted in the fast-forward framing of the visible, despite the expressed love of the exotic common to all travel writing. Given this, it is not the variety of the scenes that is really exciting but rather the underlying sensation of fast movement—the excitement of speed. *A Motor-Flight through France* is not simply a text that gets down as prose the rougher brush strokes of impressionist art, but (in a style which, in its unconsciousness, surpasses the all-too-self-aware experiments of the group) a Futurist text avant la lettre.

Tourism, as an invention of modernity that commodifies what it markets as new life experiences, follows the protocols of consumerist behavior. Tourism's protocols are very like those of shopping. As with shopping—think of Miss Honeychurch of E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908) in Santa Croce without a Baedeker, for example—tourism is chiefly practiced as flânerie. It is often described as a matter of pedestrian strolling, with frequent stops to inspect, and above all to gaze upon, the monument or art object. That art object then becomes the substitute for, and in its supposed authenticity the guarantor of, the value of every salable commodity. After this gaze at art, the buying of the souvenir reconciles the tourist to the primacy of commodification. The tourist gaze, then, has its own complicated protocols, especially when aided by amateur photography, for example. It is this gaze that is shattered in Wharton's book, and the kaleidoscope turning is a function, literally, of seeing through the windscreen of a car. This early attempt to delineate the joys of the particularity of motor tourism offers scenes observed so fast that the contemplative, reverential moment is radically condensed and the juxtaposition of often incongruous differences is what grabs our interest in the text. Speed of looking makes for surprises, dislocations, the celebration of difference, and the glamorization of shocks as pleasant and stimulating. As the car zooms toward a sight, so does the writerly eye: this textual perspective is composed of zooms and withdrawals, in a textual counterpart to a kind of composition that was just then finding its forte in a whole new medium: film. This is speed writing in the era of car technology, a new shorthand of visual "telegraphy." It was a fast notation of the experience of a "niftier" (the word was first used in the United States) kind of seeing, which replaced the older contemplative gaze of the first stage of consumerist tourism with a variegated rout.

Even more important than its shocks and quick changes, which mark it as thoroughly modernist prose, is its character as a version of *unmediated* writing. What the text attempts to do is to report immediate impressions

of scenes in a highly energetic prose. (Impressionist painters' use of the blurred outline to paint some of the very sights which Wharton describes is also related to the blurred outlines of such scenes as seen from a speeding train or car.) Its obscurity, its shock tactics, its mad juxtapositions do not sell themselves as an attempt to shock the reader, to unsettle her, to confuse her out of her complacent slow contemplativeness and comfort, as so much "shocking" prose and painting have been said, in various ways, to do: it would be an exaggeration to claim that this new kind of writerly glamour marks a subverting of earlier norms, certainties, or styles. Rather, it presents its shocks and sudden scene changes as notably pleasurable improvements on the slower, more sedate progress of earlier kinds of "just looking." Keeping its shocks on this side of the threshold of obscurity, it advertises the pleasure of speed-shock narrative, a quick look, and the rat-tat-tat of succeeding impressions. It brings us back, in other words, to adrenaline: here is a text where fast tourism is brilliant because it is adrenaline inducing, exciting in its speed and variety, a novel thrill.

It suggests the transparency of its prose with its flow of place names, followed by a phrase or sentence only of impression. This transparency, the refusal to "get in the way," to come as little as possible between the reader and the scenes the author saw, a refusal if possible to let the words tread on the experience, is the textual counterpart of the consumer's desire, when rehearsing the elegantly "natural" protocols of consumption, to find the act of consuming one to be supplemented with unmediated experiences. These are the experiences which are induced by, and in turn induce more, adrenaline. Wharton's text therefore is naive in the most modern way: its simplicity, its embrace of the actuality of the shock of the new, offers a new descriptive machinery where unmediated experience itself is presented as something that can be known by its production of a thrill, of adrenaline, of a shock which produces a sensation not only in the imagination but in the very body of the reader. Sensation fiction, the thrillers written in the Victorian period to pass the time (of waiting, while being carried) on commuter trains, a special consumer product invented to satisfy a niche market in late-nineteenth-century writing for the newly literate masses and a precursor to the detective and thriller genres, is here deployed in a new way, so that it reaches its limit in travel writing that offers sensations at speed to provoke a bodily *frisson* not at the sight of another hamlet or medieval *eglise* but as a sign of life intensely lived.

Wharton's book was written a decade after the showing of the first commercial film, at the time when films were becoming the chief mass entertainments of every city in the Western world. Film's shadowy light pictures appeared to offer the unmediated access to the gaze that books such as *A Motor-Flight through France* proposed as a literary and experiential good. With its repertoire of zooms, camera angles, long shots, and close-ups, film had at hand a repertoire of shock tactics performed at speed and without warning which worked like sleight of hand but, like Wharton's text, remained, as mass entertainment, well inside the threshold to the obscure. Film's light effects, its instant transpositions from one perspective to another and from scene to scene, also generated excitement and incited a rush of adrenaline in the viewer. As visual medium, film fitted perfectly into the protocol of consumerism that involved the reverential gaze, but its newness too made it seek new experiences. From the start, it was fascinated by the car. It was as if film intuited that this technological medium for moving at speed, and film's own technologically accelerated picture sequences, had in common the capacity to generate similar excitements in both drivers and viewers.

The new moving images of film specialized in showing the joys of the new vehicles at speed. The camera could be stationary, assuming the perspective of Kenneth Grahame's shocked characters at the sight of their first car. It could be mounted within the car, giving the views through the windscreen: in the filmed *Jim Hurst Tours*, viewers could imagine that they were inside a car looking out on the streets of Chicago and Berlin. Or it could move alongside the car, setting up the filmic conditions for the first car chase. Film is moved through a looping camera to produce a stream of images; when the movie camera films movement at speed, it is as if the medium itself and the way it works are being brought to the attention of the viewer by being replicated in the subject matter of the picture itself. Filming a racing car, film draws attention to itself: a tight symbiosis of medium and material. The way in which film became a mass medium meant that its origins too were in the fairground, the mutoscope and the peep show, not far from where, on the roller coaster, the masses were granted early experience of the new speed thrills. This promoted the car's affinity to comedy—and jibed with film's immediate coupling of comedy and speed. Film's appar-

ently unmediated gaze could illicit a physical, adrenaline-rush reaction—a reaction that appeared to closely approximate the frisson originally generated by the events represented. It could involve the viewer in the somatic quality of the experience shown much more handily than could even the jazziest modernist writing. Film took the strategies of sensation fiction, and the ploys of fairground comedy, and from the beginning wrapped them around plots that involved racing cars. Very often the climax was that staple of film action, the movie car chase.

The car chase may be the most characteristic scene in film, and it has been so from the beginning. Early silent films, such as *A Runaway Match, or Marriage by Motor* (1903), directed by the British director Alf Collins and produced by Gaumont, for example, recast the oldest romance plots as modern, technology centered, and thrilling by featuring the car chase to raise the tempo of a lovers' intrigue. In *A Runaway Match*, about a father who disapproves of his daughter's love match, the camera focuses on his car chasing after the lovers as they drive at speed to a minister. This may be the first car chase on film; it already uses point-of-view shots seen from the perspective of both pursued and pursuing automobiles.[51] Car chase scenes mean a focus on the new technology of the car, by the new technology of the moving camera, as a means to transmute ordinary narrative suspense—the excitement about what will happen next that was the basis of the detective story's addictiveness—into a format that induces a bodily sensation in the viewer. They are par excellence those moments when a medium, based on technology that enhances the power to produce modulations of the gaze, proves that it can induce in the viewer a visceral and extended affect. Movies, too, are commodities, with a price, that are meant to be consumed; often their technologically mediated looking looks on other consumer commodities, including cars, to co-opt movie viewers into the pleasure of consumption and to persuade them to buy. In moments such as those of the filming of speed—particularly in the simple palm-sweating seconds of the car chase—however, the motion picture's mechanical reproduction of the intense experience, brokered and enhanced by technology, creates a bodily sensation. At these moments, it truly makes its viewer sense excitements to be experienced rather than have her gaze at commodities to be purchased. This is a medium that forgoes any vestige of aura in favor of inciting a thrill. It finds that thrill in movement, more often than not, in the swoosh of a speeding car.

A Race for a Kiss (1904), for example, is another of the earliest films to stage the minidrama of adrenaline, transgression, and personal power that can be played out around breaking the speed limit. This short sequence is the first to show a speeding car being flagged down by a policeman, in the scene which closes the film; the film's opening dramatizes a race between a horse ridden by a jockey and a driver in a car. For this velocity to be dramatic, the speeder has to be shown as victorious over the horseman, and then transgressive of the law. Here speed is imagined as exciting only when it participates in a larger drama: a struggle against the old order of horse power, against the law, a race for a kiss. In the decade that follows, while the narrative frames of the spectacle of speed are inevitably refined, complicated, and played for their multiple possibilities (the challenge, the race, the chase, the prize), the circumstances nevertheless come to matter less as the filmic possibilities expand for rendering the essential speed experience. These possibilities arise from technological changes and camera strategies: the mounting of the camera behind the driver's shoulder, cutting and editing techniques that show off the velocity of the vehicle in contrast to the stationary, unwitting spectator by the roadside, the close-up of the driver's face behind a dulling windscreen to suggest at once the swishing effect caused by glancing *at speed*, and the terror, concentration, and exhilaration evident in the driver's eyes. Even more compelling: the shot of the car approaching at speed to scare the cinema spectators or, even better, the training of the camera either on the passing scene or on the ground beneath or immediately in front of the car, which, flying by in a blur, makes the reality of velocity inescapable. Pure speed cinema, shorn of all narrative framing, might be impossible: the illusion of cinema (itself a moving image in the projector that pretends to stillness on the screen and is presented in a still frame) always depended on a degree zero of absolute complicity between moving camera and moving image never being reached. The narrative could be presented as evidently false and conventional by being cast unapologetically as one of a number of highly recognizable genres. Consider speed's effect in comedies and the gangster film. It the caper films, elements of both these genres were bound together, with plots fueled by comedy and confrontations with gangsters that were obviously and repetitively generic, so that the thrills and spills of the overcrowded police car could become the heart of each film's experience. In the caper film, the laughter and suspense generated by the mock narratives could be rendered as warm-up acts for

the real experience that was being offered—the lovingly photographed, although simulated, experience of speed itself.

It is striking, then, that these films concern surrendering control, giving up or failing to achieve purposefulness: the opposite to the dramatic trajectory of *A Race for a Kiss*. Take, for example, the Keystone film *A Lover's Lost Control* (1915). Here pleasure itself is cast as surrender of purposefulness and order. More, the film contrasts the pleasures of being lost in consumption—it opens in a department store—with those of the car chase. It offers three sequences: a comic scene of confusion and disarray in the department store, the chase of the hero's car by the police, and—characteristically for a Keystone caper—the plunge of both police and chased car into the ocean. In this short film, the terms of the adrenaline-driven comedy that we witnessed in Robert Frank's photograph of the Dodgem car couple are laid out. Consumption of commodities and the speed experience are presented in tandem to imply that speed may be the culmination and superb intensification of the experience of commodity consumption. Or rather, since the film's scene of buying in the department store descends into a comic riot, what is suggested is that consumption pushed to its utmost intensity, to the moment when it becomes transgressive breakdown, finds its outlet in the thrill of the car chase. Evading the police by driving fast, moreover, makes speeding into lawbreaking, a defiance of the state's order. The thrill of the lawbreaker adds a modern folk heroism to the thrill of velocity. The film's confrontation of order and transgressive speed is resolved—without injury—when both chased and police cars catapult into the ocean: to the cheers of the audience, the kind of narrative of speed and heroic lawbreaking that would soon be taken up in the earliest cartoons resolves its contradictions in a comic invitation to celebrate disaster as a dream of the ultimate speed thrill, a lapsing out beyond the torque of the vehicle and the drag of gravity altogether.

Here adrenaline is being summoned up in the cinema spectator by the twin spectacles of consumption so intense it is transgressive, and speeds so fast they are thrilling both in their lawbreaking and in their own right. But the adrenaline-driven tension dissolves, effervesces, and suffuses the audience, the chasers, and the chased alike in a technological bath in the ocean. As the cars plunge, the threat of the car crash is comically overcome; the audience's assumption that transgression is impossible in modernity, that the chased will always be caught by the police, is answered by the sight

of the vehicles plunging. This plunge into the ocean celebrates speed as at one with the forces of nature, unknowable, unfathomable, as a means of achieving union with such forces, driving into a medium where the rules of weightiness, traction, torque, and all the realities that hold one down are overcome.