

INTRODUCTION

The Adrenaline Aesthetic: Speed as Culture

I think that cars today are the equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals.

— Roland Barthes, quoted in Modris Ekstein, *Rites of Spring*

La prothese organique est devenue une prothese de l'esprit.

— Christophe Tison, *L'Ere du vite*

Speed, claimed Aldous Huxley, is the only new pleasure invented by modernity. This book argues two propositions: first, that access to new speeds, whether on a roller-coaster, airplane, but especially with the automobile, has been the most **empowering and excruciating** new experience for people everywhere in twentieth-century modernity; and second, that **this experience should be thought of as political**.

First, two images. Both are British, that is, from the place where the dread of forgetting about the nation's past domination of so much of the world's space, in the British Empire, makes markers of the new order of space and speed stand out all the more. The first: from Piccadilly Circus, beginning of the twenty-first century. Lurid neon facade, awash in the logos of multinational cash: McDonalds, Sanyo, Sony, Carlsberg. These front what bills itself as the world's first virtual reality theme park. Within, intensive, half-finished construction — **the raw materials of escalators and air vents exposed amid dust and plaster** — seems aggressively apt: here the **physical space is of no consequence, and Richard Rogers's techno-architectural logic of leaving pipes exposed, as in the Lloyd's tower, is fulfilled when the guts of the building's systems are simply left unfinished**. Four escalators later, one stands in a windowless, multileveled, cacophonous, thoroughly disorienting space, every centimeter packed with video games,

virtual reality apparatuses, slot machines, and a bumper car carousel, with young, poor, multiethnic Londoners, all shifting gears, staring at screens, shouting, concentrating, screaming. The noise is searing: beyond the base notes of techno and house sound the beeping, whining, ringing, and pulsing of the banks of machines. Light is mostly the televisual vividness of flickering machines. For a pound coin, you get to sit on a pillion, hold a steering wheel, and imagine yourself in a grand prix race along a corniche road displayed on a screen. The pixel-printed road curves and swerves before you — frantically — your mudguard scratches the TV curb guard with a spray of TV sparks, you swerve to pass imaginary competitors, pensioners driving RVs at the legal speed limit, you careen around vast, steep corners, your pillion seat inclining at the rate of your imagined incline, your adrenaline rises and subsides, your hands sweat, joining the sweat of others who held this steering wheel before you, you face another curve, this one thousands of feet above a pixel-pointillist ocean — and you swerve toward the curb guard — your right headlight crashes against it, crumpling it — your car leaps backward against the rock face on the other side — your competitors are zooming up out of the horizon behind you, and your car leaps backward, front crushed, flips over, and you sigh — and the screen blanks pink and gives you a score: the game's over.

Now for the second image: Princess Diana's fatal crash. "The car was doing 196 kph — and the driver was drunk," the *Guardian* of London announced on the Monday after the horrific accident in the short-pillared underpass by the Seine at the Pont d'Alma in Paris.¹ The infamous paparazzi again and again snapped photos centimeters from the princess's face as (one rumor said) she waved her broken hand and spoke her last words: "Leave me alone." While all over the world the next morning people viewed TV images of the gruesomely crushed car, followed by lingering shots of the pillar that the car had hit, even the world's most exploitative media agreed almost at once not to publish those most telling photos of all, those (as near as was possible) of the crash itself. Media polemics focused on two issues: the fate of Britain's monarchy and the horrors of media intrusion into private lives, thus participating in what seemed close to a tacit collusion never to say the obvious thing, which was that this was a crash, a traffic accident. Diana was the "people's princess" precisely because, even if her status, wealth, and way of life were fabulously beyond those of ordinary people, she had nevertheless lost her life in a way that everyone stands a chance of losing it every day — in a car crash. Read in this way, her death marked the

confrontation of a figure whose glamour derived from the remnants of an archaic and feudal order thoroughly imbued with fantasy, and a characteristic, familiar modern event, wholly imbued with fear. In the reporting of the accident, royalty, the feudal fantasy element, could be faced and considered, but the fearful mundane quality of the car accident had to be held sacred—a last taboo of the fear of speed. In the weeks after the crash, the British Road Safety Association launched a new campaign: “We all drive a bit too fast sometimes. Slow down. Speed kills.”

The Adrenaline Aesthetic

Remember the two claims: first, speed is the single new pleasure invented by modernity. Second, the experience of speed is political.

By speed, I simply mean the sensation you get when you drive at a speed you are not used to. As you think of how pervasive and central a phenomenon speed is in modern culture, you might dwell on countless examples like my opening ones. First, video games. These games, like the earliest films, subsist in large part as homage to the car chase. In the game where you are the out-of-control speeder, the screen is your car windscreen, you accelerate as the sparks fly, you hear the tear of your tires as you side-swipe slow drivers, you imagine the torque effect at the hairpin bends, you overtake runaway trains at two hundred miles per hour, and you crash in flames: game over. Consider the thin line from this cheap thrill to that of the celebrity car crash. In the case of Princess Di—or Princess Grace, or Isadora Duncan, or James Dean—it was as if the masses were moved that one so exalted could not escape such an ordinary fate. It is ordinary: about forty thousand people (as the “safety” articles point out) were killed in car crashes on U.S. roads alone each year since Diana died. The figure for Britain is around three thousand. “Slow down, speed kills.”

What is striking about these examples is that even though each is a simulation, a representation of real events, they all still have the power to make the heart race: each can excite or terrify. The video game car chase uses simulation to make a game: the crash that killed Diana exists for almost all of us as no more than a media spectacle, a representation of what occurred. Yet their power derives from their success at awakening our own memories of real experiences. The argument of this book is this: that a series of new human-scaled and immediately vastly popular technological inventions of the beginning of the twentieth century, centrally and most importantly the

motorcar, offered to masses of people that rarest of things: a wholly new experience, the experience of moving at what appeared to be great speeds, and the sensation of controlling that movement. This, literally, was the moment at which individual people were allowed to feel modernity in their bones: to feel its power as a physical sensation, through their sensing of speed. It's an amazing moment of breakthrough because they were *not* here being offered something itself quite rare but more comprehensible: a new kind of "cultural turn." Modestly, technology had trumped culture, offering not the *frisson* of new kinds of telling, but an actual new experience. This experience — of speed — could in the first instance be *felt*: it did not need to represent itself. Still, it could be represented, and such representations, as the record of experiences, make up the fragments of evidence considered in any study in the history of speed.

It was Aldous Huxley who made the claim, in the course of his brilliant occasional writing, that speed is the only new pleasure invented by modernity; but in doing so, he went further, implicitly reckoning speed to be modernity's only newly invented experience. It is a commonplace to assert that the pace of life has accelerated in the last hundred years, and to speculate that inventions in the realm of technology — the elevator, the escalator, the zipper, the moving pavement — have brought this about. When this phenomenon has been taken seriously, this has generally been read as an affront. This is the attitude that entered cultural theory with the pioneering sociologist Georg Simmel's famous early-twentieth-century discourse on the new urbanism, "Metropolis and Mental Life." Simmel's is essentially a moralistic approach: his enthusiasm for speed as a generator of alert intelligence is undercut by his fear that the populace counteracted overstimulation by shielding themselves with the "blase attitude." I propose to counter it with Huxley's notion of speed as pleasure, the only new pleasure. At the distance of a century, it must be possible at last to outline a grammar of this pleasure. The time has come to describe its thrills and excitements. We can annotate, too, the curious appetites speed promises to sate and the incitements through which it arouses them. We can delineate the fears that accompany the fulfillment of this as every desire. Above all, since we are delineating the embracing of a *new* pleasure, we have a rare opportunity to historicize a subjective sensation: to describe a key moment in what Fredric Jameson called for in *The Political Unconscious*, a history of the senses.²

Here I stake my claim. With some of the turn-of-the-century speed inventions, particularly the motorcar, the increased regime of speed in

modernity, which, with its time clocks, schedules, and Taylorist efficiencies, was becoming more and more onerous, was repackaged as a sensation and a pleasure to be put at the disposal of the individual consumer. Speed, which had been manifested as more intense and tighter social control, was rerouted into the excessive speed of individual pleasure. As machines designed to achieve this, cars and related technologies turned out to be thoroughly characteristic modernist artifacts: they too delivered defamiliarizing shocks, stunning their users with the shock of the new. Their shocks were, however, directly physical rather than intellectual or aesthetic. The machine shocks were visceral, and this made them immediately pleasurable, touching the body, potentially addictive. Insinuating themselves into everyday life unassumingly, as if by stealth, they were immediately, enthusiastically taken up. After all, as a counterpoint to much in modernist culture that was apparently new but turned out merely to offer variations on older themes, they offered the only truly new pleasure of modernity.

Of what did this pleasure consist? What do you feel when you are driving at, say, 120 or 140 miles per hour? (Today we need to increase the rate of speed incredibly to appreciate what those first drivers felt.) As with any pleasure, speed's thrill is polymorphous and resists being pinned down. Further, the ease with which one adapts to it makes appreciation of speed as a pleasure less likely, as this familiarity—except in the case where the pleasure is rehashed and retreaded as addiction—runs counter to desire. What we need to recapture is the excitement of those who drove the first cars or saw one raise the dust on a village street, for whom twenty-five miles an hour was intensely fast. For a brief moment, roughly the first quarter of the twentieth century, the thrill of velocity at any speed was vividly palpable. To those first granted the new experience of speed, the automobile appeared to enliven people by speeding them up. The automobile was the promise, through technology, of an experience lived at a new level of intensity. In offering the new sensation of hurtling through space at speed, it gave the car's driver a striking new level of personal power, both over the most minute manipulation of the new sensation and over its effect on others—most starkly, after the first car crash, the power of life or death.

It also made demands: that the individual rapidly improvise new powers of alertness and seeing, that she revise her established sense of space and distance, that she match her own response time, her sense of her self-control of her own energy, to the acceleration of the car. The conjunction of subject body and speed machine offered early inklings of cyborg subjectivity. It

granted the machine-close subject a newly intense rush of adrenaline. As drivers, people were expected to demonstrate levels of concentration and instantaneousness of reaction rarely demanded of them in the rest of their lives. They were given a sense of excitement, a thrill, which was unprecedented. And they had to experience, engage with, and overcome a fear—of losing control or causing an accident—which was new in its immediacy and sense of responsibility. It was with the polymorphous perversity of this new pleasure that cultural representations had to contend.

The car was modernist mobile architecture; it offered a new pleasure to the masses. With it, a major realignment of the economy of pleasure and pain, duty and desire, through which the modernist persona was imagined was bound to occur. In brief, what took place was a cultural, psychic, and medical reconceptualization of the human organism: it would henceforth be valorized for its capacity for energy. The vehicle as prosthesis takes over some of the powers of locomotion of the body, then demands of it new intensities of sensory perception. Terms from the fields of locomotion, engineering, and electricity—“drive,” “sparkle,” “stress,” “energy,” “dynamism”—become the currency through which to judge the body as a suitable unit in modernist life’s speeded-up traffic. Bodies came to be judged as speed machines, not only by Taylorist utilitarianism, which demanded that human bodies as motors be maximally efficient in every movement, but in the ways that people thought of their *own* well-being as energetic machines. In French, speed is *la vitesse*: with the advent of the new speed technologies, the very notion of life as the capacity for energetic movement, long the basis of scientific accounts for living organisms, took on a new valence. Human well-being was recast more vehemently as the capacity for active movement and the management of the organism’s energy.

All kinds of cultural forces rushed in to understand this cyborgization. First there was a resurgent nostalgia for the unprostheticized fast human body: the Olympic Games were revived in 1896, corresponding to the moment of the invention of the mass-producible motorcar. (In 1896 Karl Benz patented the first internal combustion flat engine; in the United States Ransom Olds began to build cars on a production line in 1902.) In medicine, adrenaline was isolated in 1900 by Jokichi Takamine and Keizo Uenaka, two Japanese scientists working in the United States, and was conceptualized at once in terms of human response time, velocity, and drive. The numerous high modernist literary treatments of anomie and boredom—almost invariably, of pedestrian *flâneurs*—may be read in part as laments

about the horrors of slowness and, by extension, as incitements to speed's prospect of vitality. Think of the almost unbearable languor of T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* ("Let us go then, you and I, . . .") or the dreary dawdlings continually being lamented in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, an account of the excruciating slowness of inefficient transport, as told by an engineer. More strikingly, the driver's need for new levels of visual alertness for seeing in motion, for enjoying a shock-punctuated gaze, was matched by a full-scale invention in the realm of representation—the moving image. As you might guess, from the start movies specialized in car chase scenes. These and many other developments can be recouped for the cultural critic as efforts to rethink and reeducate the newly prostheticized citizen enjoying—albeit anxiously—the new speed pleasure. To comprehend the totality of what was at stake here, however, we need to extend our field of vision beyond the adventures of the morphed subject to take in the social milieu in which these new speeds were not only invented but offered as a newly pleasurable experience, a kind of social gift, to individuals. We need, in short, a politics of speed. And because any new pleasure turns out to displace and cast into upheaval the possibilities of acknowledged, existing pleasures—including aesthetic pleasure—this politics of speed turns out to be closely bound up with the politics of representation itself.

Speed politics, in the first instance, was a politics of access: this newly intense experience was offered to citizens based on their ability to pay, on their gender, proximity to centers of production, consumption, and power. Next, it was a matter of national control. Everywhere speed came to be monitored and patrolled by governments as traffic police. New national regulatory systems, with driver's licenses, speed limits, traffic signs, and checkpoints, were rapidly set in place. Fundamentally, however, the narratives of access to speed and its control need to be thought of in terms of how the access to all resources and pleasures has been organized in modernity. Since the mid-nineteenth century the story of access has been told as the matter of consumption, the desire for and possession of commodities. The story of national control has been one of the state's control of its land space, its territory, and the flow of traffic—in goods, people, workers—thereupon. In both these realms, the rush to speed was profoundly disruptive.

First, consumption. Note that speed arrived as a gift to individuals at precisely the moment when commodity culture also took over: when a market economy saturated by commodities had become the governing fact

of everyday life in the West. Already by World War I it was clear that the automobile was the most characteristic and most desired commodity of all in this new age of mass consumerism. However—and crucially—the car, while offering itself as the ultimate fetish of the commodity age, went beyond the commodity form to embody something more: it offered not the mere pleasure of ownership but, more, the possibility of the new pleasure of the experience of speed. Note that in Marx's terms the commodity has been theorized as offering a spectral, illusory pleasure; its fetishistic power resides in its potency as a *misrepresentation* (but a representation, a spectacle nevertheless) of a real relation which it hides. The automobile as glamorous commodity offered all this, but as a technology, it offered more: the possibility of the *new* physical sensation—a pleasure possibility outside the realm of the illusory if spectacular fetish of the commodity. Enter into a prosthetic relation with the machine, it promised, and (for a price) experience a new pleasure. The implicit conception of nature, and of social order of authentic relations between people based on a natural order, on which Marx had built his theory of commodification was undermined radically at this moment when technology allowed people to feel modernity in their bones. This was a key moment in the history of the commodity—a history that has more ruptures and turns than have yet been theorized.

Second, consider how the arrival of the new speed experience transformed their sense of space—and how that matters as a political fact. Clearly, when one drove at new speed, distances were foreshortened and space condensed. Consider that the promise of speed pleasure appeared at the moment when the age of empire was at its height, but just when awareness was dawning that it would soon effectively be over. The new offer of speed as pleasure participated in this political and cultural turn to the extent that it exemplified a move away from projecting desire onto the faraway exotic locale, and onto personal effort and intensity experienced on one's own body. In the late Victorian period, the boy's adventure novels spawned with the rise of pulp fiction were likely to be imperial romances, as in the tales of H. Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling. By the twenties, the new heroes were more likely to be race car drivers or adventurers who endured massive hardship to break some record of endurance, rather than colonial explorers. Pleasure as heterotopic fantasy was being replaced by pleasure in the sensation of personal strenuousness. Territoriality mattered less than mobility, and speed was envisioned not only as pleasure but as a measure of extraordinary personal power.

I am not claiming that the new pleasure of speed somehow short-circuited or transcended either commodity fetishism or the dominant epistemic mind-set of the age of empire. *Au contraire*, it worked through both to effect a more intense colonization — an endocolonization³ — of the subject-citizen's sensorium and body. In doing so, it radically altered the terms of both. The fetish of the commodity and the mirage of the heterotopic colony are, no doubt, related structurally: both are object worlds outside the viewer subject, and into which she supposedly longs to project herself — working to do so through the offers and variously theorized logics we call desire. Commodification and imperialism alike work on a logics of distance — the very sense of spatial distance that the new thrill of speed uses but operates to nullify. Nearly all accounts of modernist culture in one way or another speak of how modernist art works to show us that the object world as perceived by the subject is in fact illusory, a mirage, a simulation, an element of the “society of the spectacle.” The works do this, the accounts go, by shocking us, defamiliarizing our aesthetic sensibilities into the default mode of an epiphany. What these critical narratives still maintain, however, is the story of critical distance: that is, they assume that in the final instance modernist art demands a contemplative (and hence slowed-down) encounter. The new experience of speed as individual pleasure, however, refuses distance. This speed gives us pleasure as sensation, not as the contemplation made possible by critical distance. Thus, too, it does not need desire. What it needs — and what has not yet been given it — is what I am calling adrenaline aesthetics. This would be a new grammar of culture which overrides the imperatives of Western models of representation and aesthetic reception in modernity at least since Kant: a protocol which subsumes aesthetics under rationality by adhering to a model of critical distance and rational contemplation. Refusing this, adrenaline aesthetics works to delineate a pleasure that is effected first on the body and its sensorium.

How to explicitly show speed and its dramatic intensities, then, may have been a problem that much high modernist cultural production would tackle only tenuously, with suspicion. Popular culture, however — and especially new forms such as film — flooded in to pick up the slack. Attuned to people's everyday experiences, these forms signaled the thrills as well as the anxieties characteristic of the new speed culture. Sifting through the myriad signals from these forms about the nature of the speed experience, we can read the protocols by which elements of this experience came to be organized. We can outline a grammar of this pleasure. This in turn provides

a basis for examining its politics. This politics, conceived in the most comprehensive sense, begins with the idea that speed was modernism's greatest shock: the only one that, in altogether refusing critical distance, might refuse (even as it completely fulfills) the mirage offerings of the standard subject-other protocols of the Western post-Cartesian consciousness.⁴ In particular, it may transform their twentieth-century popular equivalents, the well-groomed narratives of consumer desire (the subject's desire to own the commodity) and dreams of empire (the subject's desire to possess the exotic other space). If speed is modernity's only new pleasure, then speed-in-culture had modernism's greatest potential to be truly new. If modernist art was propelled into strangeness by a logistics of innovations, Pound's dictum to "make it new," then a newness that was visceral in turn offered a model and a spur for newness in the realm of culture.

If much modernism is about human movement — as in the figures of the ship in Conrad, the *flâneur* and *flâneuse* heroes and heroines of Joyce and Woolf, the ramp-ascending villa inhabitants of Le Corbusier, and the stair-descending nudes of Fernand Léger — and in the organization of this movement in traffic, and if the rate of this traffic is in its speed, then speed itself becomes the very narrative heft of much modernist artistic production. In this sense, much high modernist culture gave us speed without knowing it. Therefore, to formulate a totalizing politics of the new speed pleasure, we must attend both to the myriad details of speed thrills provided by the popular, and to the big-picture purlieu of high culture. In each high modernist experimental form, the death of distance is hidden in plain sight, and speed as a way of life, a way of living, and a way of being has come true. As speed took over the texts and images of modernism, it did not make them more strange but rather helped them clarify. To trace this clarification and to show how speed infiltrated modernism is the purpose of this book. I trace how an angst at the idea of static spaces and the nostalgia for home was fostered in early mass popular culture. I explore how people were incited to desire a new pleasure which they could not really have known of in advance, and how the already familiar mechanisms of consumer desire were harnessed in the service of advocating this novel experience. I consider how anxieties about the onslaught of new speeds were countered and dispelled, and how the very ways in which culture had taught people to imagine space as pleasurable were recast in favor of experiencing rapid movement. I describe how the new protocols of speed looking were developed and explored, as a key example of how a new sensory experience

was fostered, celebrated, and thrilled to. I delineate how fear of the crash, the accident, the end of speed, was exacerbated and repressed at once, in a nerve-wracking psychic conflict which served mostly to underline the realness of the speed experience and the gravity of its effects on the human body. Speed, as the only new pleasure of modernity, had its incitements, its rules, its practices, and its terrors improvised for it in a few years—the modernist moment.

To show how the infiltration of speed into modernist representations made simpler and more self-evident the energies which often we think of as having made modernist art strange and obscure, let us consider, as opening exhibits, three artworks of speed culture. One is proto-modernist, one the product of a new technology of representation, and one avowedly modernist: a painting, a photograph, and a lithograph. In these images, from 1860, 1908, and 1915, the viewer identifies with a subject who, ever more resolutely, is snatched by speed. In the first, the unseen subject experiences the speed passively, and the landscape, through transference as pathetic fallacy, is transformed to match her mood. In the second, an intense drama makes for gyrating dynamism as the subject wrestles with speed. In the third, the subject, half in joke, *is* speed. From proto-impressionism to an image produced by a technology of fast seeing to proto-surrealism, speed seeps into modernism and wipes the blur out of its art.

First, consider J. M. W. Turner's *Rain, Steam, and Speed: The Great Western Railway* (1844) (figure 1). In the early nineteenth century, the railway introduced unprecedented speeds, but it offered them to the vast majority of people as passive experience—as passengers borne along—and as spectacle. Luckily, we need not guess at the extraordinary sense of material instability and the prospect of the dissolution of matter altogether that was inspired, in its first viewers, by the train's speed: it is recorded majestically by Turner here. Showing speed through flux and blur presages many later experiments. Turner's stunning flux-imbued impressionism *avant la lettre* makes technology seem spectral and ominous. But speed's power is acknowledged as awe-inspiringly impressive: it literally vaporizes the landscape through which it cuts. Nature becomes diaphanous when speed out-natures it. This spectral, magically transformed landscape is effective as speed spectacle because in its vague comfort, it corresponds to the helplessness with which Victorians experienced this speed: passively, as passengers. This passivity, in turn, prompted them to fantasize about the roles of the train drivers, as in Emile Zola's novel about a murderous engine-



FIGURE 1. J. M. W. Turner, *Rain, Steam, and Speed: The Great Western Railway*, 1844. Reproduced by permission of the National Gallery, London.

man, *La bête humaine* (The Human Beast) of 1890, and to compulsively render their passivity before speed as spectacle, in new genres such as travel posters, the “decorated-shed” architecture of the grandiose new railway stations, from the Stazione Centrale in Milan to New York’s Grand Central, and paintings from those of Turner to Monet’s *Gare Saint Lazare* series of 1876–77. Once speed is offered as the spectacle of a locomotive, varieties of impressionism interpose themselves as the enabling form of the image. This vagueness is nevertheless an easeful blur, corresponding to a degree to the flashing landscape seen from the carriage window. This softening of visual focus offers an implicit assurance that although speed may radically alter the world around her, or at least her perception of it, it will not disturb the essentially static equilibrium of the viewer-subject as passenger herself.

Next, consider Jacques-Henri Lartigue’s photograph of a racing car driver at the wheel, titled *Nov. 9, Road from Nice to Peira-Cava*, taken in 1908


(figure 2). Whereas Turner evokes rail speed through a swirl of diaphanous cloud, in Lartigue's photo the sense of a whorl of swirling dust results from the inadequacy of the camera lens and shutter mechanism to capture completely the details of the speeding object; it is a technological inadequacy that the photographer paradoxically deploys to great effect. Turner's whole image evokes nebulousness; here, instead, as with many early photographs of movement, the pinpointed center is in focus, defining a point of concentration which makes the margin's grainy vagueness encircle a fixed center point. Turner's evocation of the passive speed experienced by a passenger found its visual counterpoint in the steam billowing from the locomotive's engine to merge with the clouds; Lartigue's image demands that the viewer identify with the racing driver, and feel with him, that the power point of his speed is in the engine in front of him in his car. The pleasure we take with him in his speed's intensity is undercut by the glint of his goggles, the flash of his eye. Look more: this eye's flash resonates as a glance of fear. We too fear that that near-panicked eye might not be able to capture the exact curve of that twisting road as readily as can the camera's technological eye. This image turns out to be fully concentrated, focused on the driver as a point of pleasure, desire and, fear, whereas Turner's is open, diffusely dreaming of speed as a utopian flight in the way dreamers before the Wright brothers did—as a means to merge with the clouds. Turner's perspective beckons to the heavens; Lartigue's lens turns downward toward the earth. The modernist reality Lartigue captures is earthier, and he shows lots of earth to represent speed. The lesson of its concentrated focus on the driver's eye is the same lesson of many images of cars since: the need for a new personal regimen of alertness, if only for the driver-speeder's management of fear.

So we come to the final exhibit, Francis Picabia's *Portrait of a Young American Woman in a State of Nudity*. It is a lithograph reproduced in the avant-garde journal 291 in July 1915 (figure 3). Here the fear has turned to laughter. The presumptive human subject is not struggling with speed, not prostheticized, but wholly technologized. With the nude morphed into a spark plug, floating upright in total blankness, not only has technology completely replaced the tenderness of the body, but all impressionist blur, whether of sky or earth, is erased when the sentient body is acknowledged as the spark plug which makes speed possible. By being the spark that enables speed and that will experience its energy, this subject can emerge from the blur that has up to now either suggested her passivity (as in Turner)



FIGURE 2. J.-H. Lartigue, *Nov. 9, Road from Nice to Peira-Cava*.
Courtesy of Friends of J.-H. Lartigue, Paris.

or her anxious struggle (as in Lartigue). She is now wholly divorced from landscape, freed from any sense of a relation to space, place, and geography. This is why the white blankness of the background, emphasized by the thin line marking the frame, is key here. The accession to speed's energy renounces real time at the same moment as it sheds physical space: that is the meaning of the avowal of the capitalized "FOR-EVER." This image seems culled from a catalog: we are unremittingly in the world of consumer components, too, with the implication that the human body must pass through this state—that is, be commodified to access the spark of speed's energy. All this is a joke here on the Western tradition of the nude, of the separation of the technological and the human, on women's bodies, on Americans, on car parts—but a joke that is thoroughly profound. The artist has intuited a



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FIGURE 3. Francis Picabia, *Portrait of a Young American Woman in a State of Nudity*, 1915. Lithograph. Reproduced in the avant-garde journal *291*, nos. 5–6 (July–August 1915). Courtesy of the artist's estate.

supreme subjectivity for the speed moment, in which, in letting our bodies be technological components, we achieve the spark of speed as the power and pleasure of the self. Impressionist obscurity is overcome, and speed, in this high modernism (a modernism which forbids critical distance), is the evident secret of human subjectivity. Adrenaline aesthetics has worked itself out. The moment of modernist speed is announced.