AMERICAN DISCOURSES OF ACCELERATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF AN ALTERNATE PRACTICE OF MODERN AMERICAN PROSE WRITING IN THE 1920S

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vorgelegt von Svenja Fehlhaber

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Erstgutachter: Prof. Dr. Peter Schneck (Universität Osnabrück)
Zweitgutachter: Prof. Dr. Andrew S. Gross (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen)

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I INTRODUCTION

> The Seven Arts group was too ready to disregard and despise [...] very admirable and very American poets like Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams. [...] Modern writers have chosen, quite properly I think, to return from hazier emotions and sentiments to those clear, energetic, and pure sensations which lie immediately under the skin. [...] E.E. Cummings' poetry is appearing in the magazines. At its best it is a verbal dance, a dance of words in the pure state, almost of vowels and consonants. Impacts and recoils are felt vertically and horizontally over several lines of type. One has a little the sensation of a suave, well-lubricated roller-coaster – without scenery.
>
> W.C. Blum. "American Letter," 1921 (563, 565, 567)

In the May 1921 issue of the influential American magazine *The Dial*, co-editor James Sibley Watson, using the pseudonym W.C. Blum,[1] published an "American Letter" in which this statement is included. Not only Watson's pseudonym is a tribute to the American avant-garde writer William Carlos Williams (cf. Golding 67, fn. 2; Willis, "American Modern"). In the statement as such, Watson defends Williams against a group of cultural critics known as the 'Seven Arts group,' who wrongfully 'disregarded' and 'despised' Williams as well as a number of other acclaimed writers, whose approach to the modernization of literature Watson finds 'very admirable and very American.' In his description of E.E. Cummings' poetry, Watson identifies the qualities that, in his view, distinguish modern American letters: a rationalization of the verbal material ('pure state;' 'without scenery'), an intense stimulation of the reader's sensorium through sound patterns ('vowels and consonants') as well as a pleasing ('suave') reading experience created by 'vertical and horizontal' patterns in the poetic structure, which are 'energetic' enough to generate a sensation of thrill and fast movement ('roller-coaster'). With his "American Letter," Watson assumed an authoritative position in the *Dial* because, it seems, he considered it necessary to put the Seven Arts critics in their place and to clarify to *Dial* readers the legitimate way of revolutionizing American writing for the modern age: formal and stylistic experimentation that aims at an economization and condensation of linguistic material to provide the modern reader with a textually induced sensation of speed – a sensation she allegedly desires.

One of the critics Watson attacked with his statement is Waldo Frank, the associate editor of – and prolific contributor to – the 'little magazine' *The Seven Arts*. Only one year after Watson's intervention, Frank published an experimental novel, with which he blatantly failed to meet the criteria of 'good' American writing that Watson identifies in his "American Letter." In this forgotten novel, titled *City Block*, Frank not only critically negotiates the value of acceleration, which informs Watson's – and allegedly also Williams, Moore, and Cummings' – approach. He moreover uses an 'alternate' approach to modern prose writing that confounded many American critics in the domain of avant-garde letters at the time.

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[1] Watson co-edited *The Dial* between 1920 and 1929 with Scofield Thayer.

Taking Watson's and Frank's conflicting standpoints as well as the regulatory dynamic into focus that comes into relief in the introductory quote, this study explores a forgotten, 'alternate practice' of modern American prose writing which appeared in the 1920s in experimental novels about modern city life, such as *City Block*, and was met with critique at the heyday of modernism. As of yet, the circumstances that informed the emergence of this particular practice in the novels written by a number of unconnected American writers as well as its politics, its aesthetic guise and its long-term neglect have not been explored by critics of American modernism. The present study takes on this long overdue challenge. It is my contention that the dynamic process through which American literary modernism was consolidated as an intensely stimulating, economized speed-aesthetic by authors and/or critics such as Watson at least partly accounts for the roughly simultaneous appearance of the 'alternate practice' in experimental American prose as well as the initial rejection of (or, at least, the inattention to) it. My study will demonstrate that Waldo Frank's *City Block* is only one work that exemplifies this unacknowledged practice of 1920s' experimental writing, which I label 'alternate' due to its reactive (albeit not reactionary) relation to a contemporary set of norms and imperatives that had been established in the domain of modern American letters and beyond throughout the previous decades. This practice was part of the great wave of literary experimentation that swept America during the first decades of the twentieth century. Taking a dual trajectory, this thesis not only re-examines the emergence and early consolidation of American literary modernism through the lens of temporality. It also directs the critical attention to three unrecognized experimental writers and their forgotten 1920s' novels, which depict urban America without resorting completely to a speed aesthetic: Waldo Frank and *City Block* (1922), Nathan Asch and *The Office* (1925) as well as Mary Borden and *Flamingo or the American Tower* (1927). In these novels, correspondences in thematic focus, aesthetic composition and agenda come into relief, from which an alternate practice of American experimental writing can be deduced. In doing so, this study will isolate a literary phenomenon that has yet received no critical attention in modernist studies.

The so-called roaring twenties, the decade during which Asch, Borden and Frank published their novels about modern city life, have gone down in American history as the period in which "the forces and fruits of modernity [...] [had] all come together" in the modern metropolis (Mohl/Betten 31). In 1925, the Chicago School sociologist Ernest W. Burgess observed: "Nowhere else have the enormous changes which the machine industry has made [...] registered themselves with such obviousness as in the cities" ("Growth" 23). The 1920s were the decade during which the promises of modernization seemed to finally materialize for many Americans, albeit certainly not all. Right before the grave historical caesura of the 1929 Wall Street Crash, America experienced a sustained period of post-war prosperity. The economic structure seemed unshakable. More than half of the country's population was now living and working in the nation's urban centers, where a modern, thrill-saturated entertainment culture – replete with penny arcades, nickelodeons, jazz bars and taxi dance halls – boomed (Steen 59; cf. Anderson 14, Bendixen 76). The skyscraper, "an urban machine-structure" that "enacted the twentieth-century traits of functionalism, efficiency, and speed," had become "a fact of life throughout the United States by the early 1920s," as Cecelia Tichi observes (289). Meanwhile, the technological innovations of the age – the electronic telegraph, the telephone, the automobile, rapid-transit transport, electric household appliances and others – had been firmly integrated into people's everyday routines: They had become "necessities instead of luxuries" as American industrial production, after decades of technological innovation and scientific engineering, once again increased production by fifty percent, thus making another large stroke towards replacing hand-crafted luxury products with cheaply produced mass-commodities that (almost) anyone could afford (Bendixen 76). All of these phenomena attest to the fact that the twenties represent the final decade of the first of two "wave[s] of acceleration," which the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa locates around the two previous turns of the centuries ("Social" 78). Between 1880 and the late 1920s, the first wave of all-pervasive speed-up occurred: practically everyone and everything seemed to accelerate. To describe the situation more appropriately within the analytical framework that Rosa introduces in his seminal 2005 study *Beschleunigung: Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne,*[2] three analytically and empirically discrete processes of acceleration co-occurred, registering in virtually every domain of modern life: technical acceleration, the acceleration of social change and the acceleration of life's pace.[3]

As the art historian Terry Smith puts it, "[b]y the 1920s, in the United States at least, who could doubt its [modernity's] triumph? What was the jazz age but a stylish party celebrating the victory of modernity? Who dared spoil the fun?" (4). It was certainly not such acclaimed key figures of American literary modernism as John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein or William Carlos Williams. At least, this is the impression conveyed not only by Watson's comment, but also by a number of scholars who have more recently identified acceleration and innovation as constitutive themes and aesthetic principles of 'the American variant' of literary modernism.[4] Scholars working on American literary modernism, indeed, often identify the 1920s as the decade that saw "an alliance between the spirit of modernism in literature and art, and the spirit of modernism in life – between art-style and life-style" (Bradbury, "Style" 15). They draw attention to a great "excitement" about "shaping a new art appropriate for the twentieth century" in the domain of avant-garde letters (Dumenil 158–59). More generally, it has become commonplace in studies about this variant of modernism to talk of an affirmative 'alliance' between American literary modernism and the phenomenon of modernity since the 1980s, when Andreas Huyssen famously rendered the "Great Divide" between avant-garde experimentation and mass culture obsolete. Ever since, American literary modernism has been related to innovative practices in fields such as engineering, popular entertainment and science:[5] In *Melodrama and Modernity,* for instance, Ben Singer characterizes American "modernism as a celebration of modernity; as a sanctuary from modernity; as an expression of the rationalistic order of modernity" (20). Even though readings such as Singer's are instrumental in dismantling the 'Great Divide,' they tend to reinstate the formal-aesthetic paradigm[6] and to de-emphasize that literary experimentation in America was much more diverse, in political and aesthetic terms.

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[2] In its English translation, Rosa's study was published with Columbia University Press in 2013 under the title *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*.

[3] Rosa defines technical acceleration as a "speeding-up of intentional, goal-directed processes of transport, communication, and production" which manifest themselves in the increased quantity of communicative signs (i.e., information) that can be transmitted, space covered or goods produced in a given unit of time with the help of new technologies (i.e., machines) or techniques ("Social" 82). The acceleration of (social) change signifies the "ever-increasing rates" of change realized within a context that is itself marked by increased contextual change in different domains: politics, economy and science as well as art, employment, social constellations, values and attitudes (Rosa, "Social" 82-83). The frequency in which knowledge inventories or routines are revised falls into this category (cf. Rosa, "Zeitraffer" 22). The acceleration of the pace of life designates a "'compress[ion]' [of] actions and experiences: to do and experience more within a given period of time by reducing the pauses and intervals or by doing more things simultaneously" (Rosa, "Social" 87).

Another problematic trend that provides an impetus for this study is the political de-radicalization of American literary modernism in the critical discourse. Next to the notion that this particular practice was radical in its aesthetic break with the past, the proposition that the movement was not radical in political terms, not aiming to trigger a revolution of modern society, is rather common (cf. Mao/Walkowitz 3). This notion is most distinct when 'American modernism' is contrasted with 'European modernism.' While the latter is generally deemed to represent a political resistance to processes of modernization, the American variant is often said to be

> atmospherically very different from the bleak epics of contingency that European modernism produced; it lightens the modernist spirit, claims it for the historical evolution of consciousness, gives it a progressive context [...]. [I]t was often conducted in close

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[4] See for instance such comprehensive studies of cultural synthesis as Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* (1983), Lisa M. Steinman's *Made in America: Science, Technology and American Modernist Poets* (1987) and Cecelia Tichi's *Shifting Gears: Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America* (1987) as well as the studies by Nicholas Daly (*Literature*) and Hugh Kenner. For more specific, shorter examples, see Barnard; Butler; Daly, "Machine;" Kalaidjian; Morrisson, "Nationalism;" Sayre; Steinman, "Modern." Tichi even draws up a direct logical connection between canonization and the development of a machine aesthetic: "Dos Passos, Hemingway, and Williams did so [keep the principles of efficiency in mind], and their work endures largely because of it. [...] Grasping the artistic potential of the dominant technology, Dos Passos, Hemingway, and Williams exploited its possibilities and vivified the national literature" (16).

[5] An early example is Claude-Edmonde Magny's *The Age of the American Novel: The Film Aesthetic Between the Two Wars* (1948). See Bradbury, *Modern American Novel*; Bradshaw; Daly, *Literature*; Daly, "Machine;" Cooper, *Modernism*; Cooper, "Modernism;" Kadlec; Karl; Meyer; Newcomb, "Footprint;" North, "Visual;" Rabinowitz; Rasula; Singal; S. Wilson.

[6] On the formal-aesthetic paradigm, see Eysteinsson's meta-critical examinations in *The Concept of Modernism*, especially in the chapter "The Making of the Modernist Paradigm."

> relation to the forces of change in American life, picking up its detail – its new manners, its new people, its machines and skyscrapers – and acting, often, on behalf of a modernist celebration. (Bradbury, "Style" 15–16)

The tendency to refute that American modernism had a political agenda – an agenda to trigger a revolution of modern society – comes into relief also in the claim that there was "any attempt [in the movement] to influence an audience," which Suzanne Clark identifies as a notion that is equally problematic and persistent in modernist studies (6).[7] In retrospect, Clark observes that "the assumption [...] has come to prevail that the revolution of poetic language [in America] had nothing to do with a revolution of human society" (6). It is my contention that it is as problematical to disregard the 'other' elements or dimensions that existed even in radically experimental texts of the day (i.e., critical assessments of modernity, a turn to the past or to the rural, etc.) as is it to neglect the vast welter of experimental writing, greatly diverse in political, thematic and aesthetic terms, which emerged in response to the intense forces and transformations of modernization during the first decades of the twentieth century.

An ever increasing proportion of more recent scholarship on American modernism has, of course, done much to counter both of these trends. For instance, it has restored to view the diverse literary movements, practices and individual experiments that flooded the literary field at the heyday of modernism. Nonetheless, the reductive conception of American modernism as an a-political, ideologically aligned movement that was deeply involved with the national project of modernization/acceleration warrants more careful scrutiny. This study argues that this reductive conception is historically anchored in the initial consolidation of American modernism as a concept and practice. Following the editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, who point out that revisionism is "a question not just of including once forgotten (or marginalized) writers, texts, and movements but of rethinking the frames of reference according to which such forgetting and marginalizing occurred in the first place" (Brooker et al. 1), this study is divided into two parts, the first of which is not immediately concerned with the alternate writers and their texts. This first part is, however, indispensable for a comprehensive assessment of the alternate practice – its advent, aesthetic logic, agenda and marginalization – which is provided in the second part of this study. Its first part takes on the same perspective as Watson did in 1921 to criticize Waldo Frank and the Seven Arts group: Through the lens of temporality, it will reassess the historical emergence of American modernism as an a-political experiment in accelerating textual form, which is radical only in its turn from traditional forms of writing – the conception, that is, against which Asch, Borden and Frank autonomously set themselves and their novels in the 1920s.

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[7] This notion was already strong in Edmund Wilson's 1931 comment that writers such as Stein "have endeavored to discourage their readers, not only with politics, but with action of any kind" (*Axel's Castle* 298).

An examination of historical sources from the domains of early- and transitional-era film (chapter II.A), city planning and American business (chapter II.B) as well as, finally, avant-garde modernism (chapter II.C) will demonstrate that a number of acclaimed, self- and time-conscious American author(-critic)s played a vital role in establishing this very conception as they pursued a common strategy of the day – positioning themselves programmatically within an overarching 'discourse of acceleration.' In these three thematically distinct chapters, Hartmut Rosa's three categories of acceleration will be employed to pin down different materializations of acceleration in these domains. For instance, it will become evident that authors such as Williams, Moore or Cummings were devising ever novel techniques (i.e., accelerating change) to design economized texts composed of terse sequences of formal and stylistic feats (i.e., technically accelerate texts)[8] which would subject readers to higher rates of stimulation (i.e., accelerate their pace of life by increasing their 'experiences' per time unit).

The domains which are in focus in the first two chapters of part one (II.A and II.B.) have been selected according to their relevance for one or more of the novels examined in the second part of this study. Without an in-depth understanding of these contexts, it would be impossible to unearth the levels of meaning that are inscribed for instance in the following descriptions from Borden's *Flamingo*: The protagonist's "closed eyelids became a kind of movie screen" at night on which "pictures formed instantly [...] and succeeded each other with breathless rapidity [...] and he was bound to look. He couldn't stop the performance" (197). It would be equally difficult to pinpoint the signal effect which the following utterance by *Flamingo*'s architect-protagonist had within the discourse of acceleration: "beautiful clear angles, geometric masses, walls that stream up, stream down, breathless, straining, the architecture of suspense, of aspiration" (249). The same holds true for the striking enumeration of verbs which Asch employs on the opening pages of *The Office*: "buy – sell – exchange – beg – borrow – steal – cheat – give – take – donate – endow – deceive – lie – sympathize – pity – love" (12).

As I build my argument on historical source material, I furthermore unearth why a process of acceleration occurred in all of these domains between the 1880s and the late 1920s. Taking a discourse-analytical approach, I will demonstrate that acceleratory waves cannot alone be explained through the Weberian logic that actors are driven by an intrinsic force (their secular Protestantism, their competitive nature, their fear of falling behind) to accelerate their practices and 'products,' as Rosa suggests – or through the "self-reinforcing 'feedback system'" which Rosa labels the "circle of acceleration." Owing to the fact that Rosa is interested in theorizing acceleratory waves, his circular model of acceleration does not account for the acceleratory 'force' that materialized on the level of discourse during the first wave of acceleration. Rosa's model systematizes the "reciprocal relationships of mutual escalation" that exist between the three categories of acceleration: technical acceleration, the acceleration of social change and the acceleration of life's pace (*Social Acceleration* 156, 151).[9] In contrast, the present study approaches the phenomenon of acceleration by focusing on source material form a historically and geographically specific context and, in its second part, on writers and texts that break out of the circular system of acceleration sketched by Rosa. In this way, it reveals that another driving force of acceleration emerged on the level of discourse during the first wave of acceleration.

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[8] With the exception of Jonathan Trejo-Mathys' translation of *Beschleunigung*, English versions or translations of Rosa's work use the term 'technological acceleration' as a direct translation of the German term '*technologische Beschleunigung*.' In my study, I will use the broader term 'technical acceleration' to refer more generally to any form of 'technical' innovation, which aims to accelerate, including experimental techniques in modern poetry or cinematographic techniques such as editing in film. Only when I am referring to specific technological forms of acceleration (as in the telephone, the subway, etc.), I use the term 'technological acceleration.'

In this study, the term 'discourse of acceleration' does not merely denote "a wide-ranging debate on the causes and effects of social acceleration" that attempts "to make sense of the ramifications of social speed," as it does in Rosa's texts (Rosa/Scheuerman, "Introduction" 7). It refers to a complex dynamic, worked by discursive acts performed by various agents during a specific period and in a specific context, through which norms and imperatives emerge and proliferate: During the first wave of acceleration in America, for instance, some exhibited fast short films in a terse sequence, some published experimental poems and explained that these are designed to give the reader a receptive experience of speed and yet others publically applauded such acts as innovative, modern and American while scolding 'divergent' acts. On their own, each of these recurrent discursive acts functioned as a directive, impelling other agents to accelerate yet again; in their sum, they established acceleration as the norm and imperative within a specific context. When many (albeit, of course, not all) ambitious actors of the day began to base their own verbal and non-verbal acts as well as their positive and negative responses to others, on the new American value of acceleration, I argue, they set a dynamic of acceleration into motion on the level of discourse.[10]

The emergence of acceleration as a modern American value can be traced back to the first significant advances in technological acceleration (the railroad, the rotary press, the electric telegraph),[11] which fundamentally transformed contemporary conceptions of space and time and instigated a new, modern phase of pioneering that reached its climax during the first wave of acceleration between 1880 and the late 1920s. At the latest since the closure of the western territorial frontier in the 1890s, 'American pioneering' was reconfigured as a commitment to the conquering of new temporal frontiers through invention and innovation, especially in the form of technological acceleration. Describing this development in 1919, Waldo Frank observed that "the Trail of the pioneer hardened into the railroad. Pioneering became Industrialism" (*Our America* 57) and eleven years later, Mary Borden wrote: "[O]rganized by such geniuses for mass production and distribution as Mr. Henry Ford, bands of American Crusaders are ready to start out [...] to save and Americanize the world, any old world. [...] They don't approve of it [...], they want to make it new" ("French Morals" 567). At roughly the same time, general-interest newspapers in America celebrated women and men as the heroes of the new age who had increased their lives' pace by using a technological appliance: Salome Lanning Tarr, Woodrow Wilson's stenographer during his 1912 election campaign, and Margaret B. Owen, an award-winning speed-typist, became role models of "speed and accuracy" ("Learn Stenography" 10)[12] and the director of Rock Island Pacific Railway was celebrated in the *New York Times* in 1915 because he had devised "high-speed methods" to prevent a default on the Rock Island debentures and had "raced to Chicago twice within three days" while staying "in touch with half a dozen cities on the long-distance telephone, to interest bankers and rich individuals" in his company's shares ("High-Speed Financing" 13). In 1907, the following commentary appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*:

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[9] When innovation occurs in the realm of technical acceleration (i.e., an actor devises a new machine or technique), he argues, this automatically brings about "changes in social practices, communication structures, and corresponding forms of life." During acceleratory waves, the "time-spans of relative stability" are, hence, shrinking (Rosa, *Alienation* 31, 18). In Rosa's logic, the result is that people feel a need to constantly adapt to new conditions ("*Anpassungszwang*") and become eager to do and experience more in less time ("*Verpassensangst*") in order to avoid falling behind on the "slipping slopes" of an ever-changing world (*Beschleunigung* 218, 218, 284-85). This closes the acceleration circle: In their attempt to avoid desynchronization, individuals "pursue novel, purportedly time-saving technologies," thereby raising the demand for new time-saving techniques and technologies (Rosa/Scheuerman, "Introduction" 24; cf. Rosa, "Social" 91).

[10] For the sake of creating a coherent argument, I focus primarily on those actors who participated in forming and maintaining domain-specific discourses of acceleration. I mention counter-discursive actors only sporadically in this part of the study before I turn the focus completely to three such actors in the study's second part.

> There is little doubt that historians will describe the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth as the 'speed age,' and deservedly so. Everywhere in every line of business it is a mad rush for greater wealth, manufacturers must produce faster machinery, railroads make faster schedules, speed contests are of daily occurrence somewhere. With showy headlines as though a great victory had been won over an enemy, the announcement of a train going sixty, or is it seventy (?) miles an hour is made. ("The Speed Craze that Prevails" 6)

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[11] In 1848 Carl F. Gauß and Wilhelm Weber first used electro-magnetic means to transmit information and the telegraphic code developed by Samuel Morse was soon used by railroad companies. The transformation of sound into electronic signals, first patented by Alexander G. Bell in 1876, further accelerated the process to the speed of the electron; after Heinrich Hertz' discovery of electromagnetic waves, Guglielmo Marconi applied them for radiotelephony in the 1890s (cf. Borscheid 152f., 162f., 167).

[12] On August 4, an article in the *New York Times* praised the young stenographer, "the world' champion [...] for accuracy in taking dictation at high speed," side by side with the statesman Wilson, who was allegedly "something of a shorthand writer himself" ("Gov. Wilson's" 10). Twenty-one days later, the paper covered Tarr's performance during Wilson's acceptance speech with a full-page article, a large portrait as well as a reprint of part of her notes. The text detailed how "surprised" Wilson was by the "record-breaking time" at which Tarr had taken his speech in shorthand and translated it back for reporters ("Is Speed" SM14). Another of Wilson's speed-shorthand writers, Charles L. Swem, became the protagonist in the advertisements of Gregg's Publishing Company, the inventor of Gregg's Shorthand System, which Swem used to transcribe Wilson's speeches at "highest speed" (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 22 Sept. 1912; see the company's advertisement in the *New York Times* on February 5, 1922 as well. For exemplary news coverage of Owen, see "Breaks Own Record on Her Typewriter;" "Typewriter Speed Secrets" or "Typewriting Champions."

The study's first part explores the ways in which various ambitious American actors operated strategically to establish acceleration as a norm and imperative in their own fields of engagement at the end of the nineteenth century in order to legitimize their new practices and 'products' within an overarching discourse of acceleration, which emerged in America during the first wave of acceleration, as these historical sources illustrate. These self-promotional acts sparked domain-specific, yet interlocking discourses of acceleration.[13] Highlighting existing similarities in rhetoric and normative frameworks, this study traces and classifies the specific acts[14] in which a dynamic of acceleration comes into relief: 'self-validation' (or 'self-canonization') and 'extrinsic validation' or 'regulation.' With these acts, actors sought to legitimize their own and others' practices and rebuked those who did not comply to the norms and imperatives upon which they based their own actions – as for instance Watson did when he attacked Waldo Frank in *The Dial*. Thereby, actors such as Watson instituted and reinforced the imperative to accelerate for everyone else in their field. By showing that actors from all three domains adopted a rhetoric of acceleration and based their value judgements on the new 'American' value of speed-up, I will corroborate my claim that a strong driving force of acceleration emerged on the level of discourse at the time.

The last of the three chapters (II.C) will demonstrate that a number of avant-garde authors of the day programmatically stylized their own practices and 'products' as fast, innovative and American in order to ensure their relevance and persistence in the modern age. Within their own field, this ambition entailed that they took a leading role in the primary process of conceptual consolidation and canonization, which impacted the secondary process of this kind in the emergent critical discourse on American modernism: As literary critics entered the field and joined in the project of acclaiming authors according to these very criteria, a particular variant of experimental writing was established – quite reductively – as a canonical, essentially uncritical practice that was adapted, in practically all respects, to the new American norm of acceleration. It is, of course, possible and necessary to critically debate the adequacy of this conception and the prevalence it reached during the first two decades of the new century. However, this study is not primarily interested in dynamiting the rails on which this conception runs; rather, it wants to provide a metanarrative that touches upon the historical process through which this conception was established in the first place. In other words, chapter II.C does not aim to describe the 'reality' of American experimental writing in the modern age (i.e., the diverse aims, politics and aesthetics of various modernism*s*) but it traces the process through which 'American modernism' emerged as a discursive construct during the first wave of acceleration.

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[13] I will use the term 'overarching discourse of acceleration' whenever I am referring, more generally, to the larger American discourse in which all domain-specific discourses of acceleration interlocked – in which the dynamic of validation and regulation in one domain-specific discourse intersected with the same dynamic in other fields. While I look at moving picture trade journals, the *Wall Street Journal* or modernist little magazines to reconstruct domain-specific discourses, I will retrace the overarching discourse of acceleration in general-interest newspapers such as the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* or the *Los Angeles Times*.

[14] The term is used in the broadest possible way in this study: it comprises verbal and non-verbal acts performed by an individual or corporation, for instance, a spoken or printed statement, a published film or book, or a building or street.

This extensive investigation of the overarching discourse of acceleration in America provides a firm foundation for the re-assessment of three experimental writers and their works in the second part of this study. Only with this background in place, it becomes feasible why not only Asch or Borden but also Frank set out individually, yet at roughly the same time, to oppose this very discourse with their literary and non-literary texts and why they took a reductive conception of American modernism as the contrastive foil against which to set their individual works in the 1920s. Doing so, they erected an aesthetic and ideological antagonism between their own approaches and 'American avant-garde modernism' that is in fact not as absolute.

Following both Ann L. Ardis and Richard Brodhead, this study seeks to examine the self-promotional "exclusionary moves" that some American avant-gardists of the day staged in literary magazines in order to achieve that "modernism [would] come to be perceived as *the* aesthetic of modernity" (Ardis 7).[15] Moreover, the first part of each case study in part two will demonstrate that Asch, Borden and Frank, too, operated strategically as actors within the overarching discourse of acceleration, albeit for a different purpose and as individuals rather than as a collective: Although they were eager to succeed as modern writers, each of them adopted a strategy of self-distancing in order to "*make* themselves authors of different sorts by the way they accepted or resisted the values constellated around" American literary modernism at the time (Brodhead 174).[16] Accordingly, this thesis will not merely introduce relevant biographical contexts, but it will illuminate how Asch, Borden and Frank positioned themselves within the discourse of acceleration by publishing critical- or literary texts and establishing personal associations with various (political/literary) movements, respectively. Particularly the bonds that each of these writers entertained with different modernists in and beyond America will be addressed. The individual ways in which they distanced themselves from the speed-mania and a-politicality they saw proliferating in modern American letters will come under scrutiny: 'failing intentionally,' each of these writers used forms of 'going slow(er)' as acts of resistance in the age of acceleration.

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[15] Doing so, I take the cue from the recent trend in the field to unearth processes of conceptual consolidation and canon-formation at the heyday of modernism. In contrast to a scholar such as Astradur Eysteinsson, who argues that "it is primarily the academy, as a literary institution, that has engendered and fostered the norms and values determinant in 'constructing' paradigms' of modernism" (75), this trend explores processes of pre-institutional canonization, looking at the synergies and interactive patterns within little magazines. See for instance the groundbreaking analyses by Bornstein; Britzolakis; Golding; Churchill/McKible, "Modernism;" Jaffe, Aaron and Jonathan Goldman; Malcuit; Marek, Morrisson (*Public*; "Nationalism"); Newcomb, "Poetry's Opening;" Vondeling as well as Wexler. This more recent engagement has grown out of the meta-critical turn of the 1980s, when scholars began to study the conceptual history of modernism. Eysteinsson's comprehensive overview in *The Concept of Modernism* serves as a general reference book (see also Brooker et al.; Bru; Graff; Mao; Nicholls; Sholes). For a comprehensive history and differentiation of the medium, see the 2012 volume *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume II North America 1894-1960*. The growth of digital collections and reference sites dedicated to modernist magazines greatly facilitates this engagement: the Modernist Journals Project (modjourn.org/), the Blue Mountain Project (bluemountain.princeton.edu/), Magazine Modernisms, a reference site for digitized little magazines (magmods.wordpress.com/magazines-online/), as well as the Index of Modernist Magazines (sites.davidson.edu/littlemagazines/magazines/).

[16] Richard H. Brodhead describes similar processes in his scrutiny of co-existing nineteenth-century cultures of letters in *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America*.

To render the introduction to these formerly neglected authors and the enquiry into the circumstances of their neglect even more comprehensive, contemporary critical responses to Asch's, Borden's and Frank's literary work (specifically to their 1920s' novels) will be considered, particularly with regard to the question how each reviewer's political and ideological background informs the readings and classifications they offered. This will provide important insights into the processes that conditioned the neglect of *City Block*, *Flamingo* and *The Office* at the heyday of modernism.

The revisionary work I conduct in this study effaces one of the blind spots that still exist in the thriving field of modernist studies. As of yet, these three writers and their respective contributions to modern American literature have been largely neglected or at least marginalized. Although a number of literary scholars have raised their voices in favor of a revival of interest in Waldo Frank's prose throughout the decades,[17] the only three comprehensive studies on this subject date from 1923, 1955 and 1967: Gorham B. Munson's monograph *Waldo Frank: A Study*, William Bittner's dissertation *The Novels of Waldo Frank* and Paul J. Carter's monograph *Waldo Frank*.[18] The few studies that still mention Frank at the most either address his "intellectual and personal friendship" with a recognized American modernist such as Jean Toomer (Helbling 169; cf. Yellin) or they move the mention of Frank's influence to footnotes or parentheses.[19] As part of a body of leftist criticism published by the so-called 'Young American critics' in and beyond the magazine *The Seven Arts*, Frank's extensive critical writings have continued to receive moderate recognition (see Blake; Hegeman; Hoffman). His novels, however, remain forgotten even if Bittner and others are convinced that he "has, in offering a fresh theme and a new technique of the novel [...], been more truly creative than a bushel of more skilled novelists" (Bittner, "Waldo" 484; cf. Willingham; Aaron; P. J. Carter; Nilsen, "Waldo").

Nathan Asch's prose has received even less critical attention. Even though Rita Barnard labels *Pay Day* (1930) a "most thoroughly 'modern' American novel" in her contribution to the *Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* (2005), this has remained unchanged (42). While some address Asch's 1937 novel *The Road: In Search of America* in the context of Depression-era documentary travel writing (see Gross; Minter), there currently exists no study that explores the experimental debut novel *The Office* (1924) and the autobiographical novel *Love in Chartres* (1927), which Asch published prior to the stock market crash of 1929.

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[17] In 1958, John R. Willingham professed that "Mr. Frank and his work are due for a considerable revival of interest" (465). Again in 1980, it seemed "important" to Helge N. Nilsen "to redirect the attention toward those parts of Frank's work which remain significant" ("Status" 27).

[18] In addition, Thomas Reed West devotes a chapter to Frank in *Flesh of Steel: Literature and the Machine in American Culture* (1967) and M. Keith Booker includes Frank's novel *Holiday* in his volume *The Modern American Novel of the Left* (1999).

[19] Lewis Mumford asserts that "after 1950 he [Frank] was no longer a star but a dead planet, almost invisible even by the reflected light of other stars" (xvi).

Mary Borden's collection of war writing, *The Forbidden Zone*, was recently reissued[20] and since the 1980s, scholars seeking to appraise the experimental war writings by female authors have admired its "formal adventurousness" (Montefiore, "Shining Pins" 51).[21] Just as Frank's and Asch's fiction, however, Borden's novels have been entirely neglected. Even scholars working on her war writings note that "[l]ittle has been written about Borden's work, despite her having written twenty novels, as well as stories, poems and essays" (Higonnet 198). *A Woman of Two Wars: The Life of Mary Borden* (2010) by Jane Conway at least provides a historical overview of Borden's literary output. Additionally, it offers (rather sketchy) insights into the critical reception of her individual works. As of yet, however, only John Eckman's unpublished 1998 dissertation *Urbanization and American Fiction, 1880-1930* addresses Borden's most experimental novel *Flamingo* from a literary studies perspective. In a chapter on "Metropolitan Modernity," Eckman discusses *Flamingo* alongside Dos Passos' 'modernist' masterpiece *Manhattan Transfer*. Eckman's assessment remains relatively superficial, however, as it mainly focuses on plot development and critical content yet fails to analyze *Flamingo*'s experiments with style, form and narrative design. It addresses the work's "experimental formal structures" as well as its "surrealistic, stream of consciousness narratives" only in passing (Eckman 128, 137).

The second part of each case study will approach this desideratum. Extensive close readings of Frank's *City Block*, Asch's *The Office* and Borden's *Flamingo* will be conducted in a chronological order.[22] As these readings will elucidate, it would be just as inadequate to claim that Asch, Borden and Frank were not involved in the process that made them into authors 'of a different sort' as it would be to claim, as a number of contemporary reviewers did, that all of them lacked authorial talent because their prose deviated from both 'modernist' and conventional standards.

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[20] *The Forbidden Zone* was republished by Hesperus Press in 2008. Already in 1999, Margaret Higonnet includes "Moonlight," "Conspiracy and "Blind" in her collection *Lines of Fire* and Agnès Cardinal, Dorothy Goldman and Judith Hattaway choose "The Beach" for inclusion in their volume *Women's Writing on the First World War*. Selected poems from *The Forbidden Zone* have more recently been anthologized in Higonnet's volume *Nurses at the Front* (2001), Tim Kendall's *Poetry of the First World War* (2013), Paul O'Prey's *Poems of Love and War* (2015) and A. Scott Berg's *World War I and America* (2017). Prey's volume includes formerly uncollected war poems by Borden ("Come to me Quickly," "Escape," "There is a Monster in the Valley," "Sonnets to a Soldier").

[21] Nosheen Khan called Borden "the most impressive female poet of the battlefield" due to the "modernist" quality of her work already in 1988 (123, 120). More recently, Jennifer Gromada has identified *Zone* as "a significant modernist World War I text" (600), Higonnet has described it as "especially provocative in its modernist rupture with literary conventions" ("Great" 122), Angela K. Smith has recognized that Borden's technique is "reminiscent of the precision of Imagism" (*Second Battlefield* 88), Laurie Kaplan has identified the collection as an "experimental literary artifact" which uses "modernist narrative techniques" (35) and, finally, Max Saunders has written in 2009 that "*Zone* is in many way a Modernist text [...], and the fragments have the technical self-consciousness and metaphoric intensity we expect of classical Modernism" (181). See Acton; Das; A. Freedman; Gromada; Hutchinson (143); McGowan; McLoughlin and A. K. Smith, *Women*;. Such elements in Borden's prose, especially *The Romantic Woman* (1916), *Jericho Sands, Jehovah's Day* (1928), *A Woman With White Eyes* (1930), *Sarah Gay* (1931) and *Flamingo* remain as "Undeservedly Forgotten" (Montefiore, "Undeservedly" 66) as they were once in *Zone*.

[22] This order is neither meant to suggest that Frank took a lead (ideologically or aesthetically) among these writers, nor that Asch or Borden based their practice on the alternate aesthetic used by Frank. The three alternate writers developed their stance and their aesthetic approach independently from one another at roughly the same time.

The close readings will foster a deeper understanding of each novel's unique stylistic, formal[23] and thematic engagement with the first wave of acceleration. They will moreover reveal that, in spite of their differences, there exist correspondences between these three novels with regard to their authors' self-positioning within the literary field as well as concerning their aesthetic composition and agenda. On the basis of these correspondences, this study retrospectively deduces an 'alternate practice' of 1920s' American experimental prose writing. The novels written by Asch, Borden and Frank during this very decade reveal that each of these writers felt that no existing approach suited their purposes. All three works appear specially designed to signal to readers that they are modern American novels 'of a different sort.' In each novel's unique stylistic and formal conception registers a "self-conscious refusal of the forms of artistic practice marked as 'major'" at the time (Brodhead 175), in this context an aesthetic reproduction of modern (life's) speed. Despite their differences, each of these novels is set against the affirmative and 'reproductive/adaptive' aesthetic that a number of prominent avant-gardists of the day appeared to endorse – their writers independently conceived of modern literature as a space of resistance and imagination. Driven by a 'generative' agenda, not only Asch and Borden but also Frank presented in and through their novels equally alternate, yet highly individual visions of modern life and literature.

An underlying 'generative' agenda can be deduced in the conception of each novel, as the three case studies will demonstrate. For one, techniques of textual acceleration are used within them not merely for the sake of meeting the contemporary imperative of acceleration. Instead, they are employed for a specific purpose and only when absolutely necessary: The text in each of the novels is accelerated[24] only as far as it is necessary to convey through it a critical diagnosis that refutes the unconditional positivity of speed-up, challenges common conceptions of success and failure and, thus, (potentially) creates in the reader a critical awareness of speed's negative effects.[25] For instance, several common techniques of textual acceleration are appropriated in the novels in varying ways to evoke the psychological or cognitive challenges that high-speed living (i.e., hyperstimulation) poses to a modern individual. In *Flamingo*, for instance, 'fast' and 'slow' passages are alternated to produce an effect of defamiliarization that sensitizes the reader to the downside of speed and to the positivity of slowness. By thus experimentally 'modernizing' American prose and employing what I call a 'critical diagnostic mode' to assess the effects of acceleration on individual and social life in a holistic manner, it seems, each of the three writers aimed to incorporate a generative potential within his or her 1920s' novel: the potential that the respective narrative fosters a critical awareness in the reader. Various critical diagnoses about speed's detrimental effects on individual and social life confront the reader throughout *City Block, Flamingo* and *The Office*. In order to historicize the diagnoses that are presented in the individual novels, existing parallels to the work of contemporary medical commentators (George M. Beard, John H. Girdner), left-wing intellectuals (Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer) and sociologists (Thorstein Veblen, Georg Simmel, Chicago School sociologists) will be pointed out throughout the analytical chapters. In doing so, I do not wish to suggest that these 'intellectual' critiques are directly referenced in the respective novel. Rather, I thereby address the fact that Asch, Borden and Frank each aimed to sensitize their readers to problems that other critical commentators were identifying as pressing at the time as well.

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[23] Adopting the classification that Gorham B. Munson introduces in *Style and Form in American Prose*, I use the term 'style' to describe a "mode of presentation," so for instance the (non-)experimental quality of the language, the choice of words, the use of tonal patterns and syntax, etc. The term 'form' will meanwhile refer to the "aesthetic organization" of an artistic work on a higher level: "Form is what one sees and feels when one takes a whole view of the structure of a given work. Style one sees and feels concurrently with one's passage through the work" (*Style* 17).

[24] In the close analysis, I draw on the theoretical categories of acceleration provided by Rosa and appropriate them for literary studies. This enables me to identify temporal structures within the respective text, as well as their possible effects.

[25] Of course, my literary analysis does not (and could not possibly) make any empirical claims about the degree to which 'the reader' of Asch's, Borden's and Frank's novels is disillusioned, sensitized to something or animated to act. Since I contend that these alternate novels were specially designed to affect and activate the reader, I nevertheless use these formulations when I identify (stylistic, formal, narrative) mechanisms within these texts that appear designed to have a specific impact on the reader. In these cases, I of course always describe a potential or even feasible, yet never an inevitable effect.

The endeavor to devise a new form of modern American writing that draws readers' attention to the detrimental effects of acceleration represents a distinctive 'generative' aspect that marks the practice that Asch, Borden and Frank devised autonomously, yet simultaneously during the first acceleratory wave. On yet another level, their novels can be labelled 'generative:' All of them negotiate the phenomenon of acceleration in nuanced and action-oriented ways: they never categorically reject progress and modernization as such but, geared toward optimization as they are, they explore viable alternate lifestyles and coping mechanisms that could make high-speed modernity more livable. Although the alternate vision of modern life presented in each novel is unique, as the three close readings in this study will demonstrate, all of these visions revalidate 'the old and slow' (traditional values, deceleration, etc.) and propose that modern life is only truly livable if these are combined with 'the new and fast' in generative ways.

The third 'generative' dimension that will emerge as a distinctive feature of the alternate practice across the three case studies is, finally, that all three novels are designed to trigger activity and change: they teem with various formal and stylistic, as well as narrative mechanisms that are specially designed to generate a critical change of mind in the reader and to provoke her to take action. These diverse mechanisms invite her to challenge the universality of the acceleration imperative, to try out the alternate modes of living sketched in the novel and to transform her individual and social life into a more gratifying form. As these preliminary elaborations on the three generative dimensions of the alternate practice indicate, I use the label 'generative' instead of 'productive' because the latter designates a more strictly industrial logic of output orientation, which I do not see at work in either of the novels. The adjective 'generative' more appropriately describes the strategic, yet experimental ways in which not only Asch and Borden but also Frank engaged with the elements of modern American culture in their fiction, as well as the way in which this very engagement in each individual case aimed to challenge and optimize rather than to merely represent/reproduce a historical condition.

Historically, the generative agenda can be understood as both a revitalization of the *fin de siècle* reform spirit and as an anticipation of the practice-orientated assessments of American life during the Depression era. Unlike progressivist reformers attending to Gilded-Age ills such as inefficiency, corruption, social injustice, urban immorality and widening class divisions, however, the writers addressed in this study were skeptical about the effects that an all-pervasive professionalization, efficiency-engineering and speed-up of American life would have. During the decade which has often been characterized as "curiously lacking in events" – as "an oasis [...] between the progressivism of the early part of the century" and the "political involvement and the social restructuring of the nineteen thirties" (Bradbury, "Style" 11)[26] – each of them set out on their own to criticize that the pervasive drive toward modernization and acceleration had not only brought the nation a period of prosperity and stability but had negatively impacted individual and social life as well, especially in the metropolis. In this regard, all of them anticipated the critique formulated by left-wing writers such as Dos Passos, Michael Gold, Richard Wright or H.T. Tsiang in the 1930s,[27] even if the critiques and the three visions that Asch, Borden and Frank propagated during the 1920s, were less radical. Instead of claiming that capitalism needs to be overthrown altogether, each of them aimed for optimization and made a case for retaining some 'old and slow' values and practices as a way of coping with the demands of life in New York. The mystic Frank sought to re-integrate a spiritual dimension into people's modern lives and the feminist Borden proposed that both men and women should combine their enthusiasm about progress/speed with a critical awareness and an appreciation of 'the old and slow.' Asch meanwhile formulated a general ethical appeal for a re-integration of slowness (i.e., critical reflection, gardening, conversing) into people's harried lives. With these unique yet comparable visions, each of these writers anticipated the way in which less radical Depression writers, among them Zora Neale Hurston, "found in the past a means of responding to the dislocations of the present moment" (Conn 8).

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[26] As Richard Pells points out, "the tone of intellectual life in New York changed" after World War I, "the New York intellectuals became less passionate about political and social issues. [...] To be 'serious' [now] meant paying attention to literary craftsmanship" rather than to political issues (10). For a similar assessment, see Thomas Bender's explanation of his claim that "the rich interweaving of politics and culture [...] did not survive the war, nor did the[] confident assumption that radical or progressive and advanced or 'modern' art were natural partners" (249).

[27] Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930), for instance, ends with the revolutionary conversion experience of the destitute protagonist, as he encounters a man on soap box who announces the uprising of a "world movement," a "workers' Revolution" that will "abolish poverty" altogether. The closing sentences of *Jews* evoke the protagonist's elation in the prospect of an imminent proletarian revolution: "O Revolution, that forced me to think, to struggle and to live. O great Beginning!" (309). Particularly the last two 'chapters' in Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938) promote "the ultimate necessity for a multiracial, class-based politics" (Foley 209): In "Fire and Cloud," the African American Reverend Taylor goes from the vague notion that "mabbe them Reds is right" in saying that only public mass protest can possibly change conditions for the poor black (and white) citizens in town, to joining them in a transracial protest march at the end of the story; "Bright and Morning Star" centers on African American characters who commit themselves to the same idea of a transracial Communist revolution ("'Ah cant see white n Ah cant see black,' he [Johnny] said. 'A sees rich men a Ah sees po men'") despite the fact that they will be imprisoned or even tortured and killed for taking this stance (*Uncle* 130, 192). Tsiang's experimental novel traces the transformation of the unemployed protagonist Mr. Nut to a radical activist, who "placed his hopes" for "A new world. A better world" into the red flag of Communism (156), shouts "Down with the landlords," "To hell with salesmen" and "Down with capitalism" in public and, finally, hangs himself on a flagpole on Union Square (127). For a comprehensive overview of radical proletarian fiction from the 1930s and earlier, see Barbara Foley's study *Radical Representations*.

In recovering an unacknowledged engagement with the first wave of acceleration in the 1920s, this study participates in two only loosely affiliated, yet equally thriving trends in contemporary scholarship: the interdisciplinary study of speed and temporality as well as the revisionary trend in "new modernist studies," which has transformed the term 'modernism' "from an evaluative and stylistic designation to a neutral and temporal one" (Mao/Walkowitz 1–2). Although this might seem counterintuitive, the recent explosion of trans-disciplinary interest in the phenomenon of acceleration, which emerged in response to the second, digital wave of acceleration (cf. Rosa/Scheuerman, "Introduction" 7), provides one of the central incentives for the reexamination of American writers and novels from the modern era in this study.[28] As the debates about temporality proliferated in and far beyond academic circles, 'slowness' or 'mindfulness' (German *Achtsamkeit*) suddenly evolved as watchwords of a new twenty-first-century morality of the privileged classes and some academic (often sociological) commentaries treated the first acceleratory wave as a relatively minor and hardly overwhelming actors to the allegedly far more deep-reaching acceleration in our post-industrial age (e.g. Bauman; Harvey; Levin; Mulgan; Tomlinson). Peter Brooker identifies this tendency as a form of "nostalgia of wholeness" that runs, for instance, through David Harvey's famous study *The Condition of Postmodernity*: "As so often," Brooker writes, "postmodernism is [here] made to figure as modernity's other – the superficial or merely playful, the derivative or discordant – the 'chaos', in short, which threatens modernity's harmony and common purpose" (*Modernity* 3). These two trends provide impetus for the present study, which reveals that there exist historical assessments of the first acceleratory wave that might have inspired these reductive postmodern stylizations of modernity as an era of wholeness, control, scientificity and purpose. Additionally, it recovers three unsung precursors who criticized and countered such reductive assessments already a century ago in the domain of American letters. The results of these two related undertakings are collected in the two parts of this study: in part one, which concerns the discourse of acceleration and in part two, which focuses on the counter-discursive actors Nathan Asch, Mary Borden and Waldo Frank as well as their novels *The Office*, *Flamingo* and *City Block*.

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[28] Throughout the last decades, a considerable number of monographs, anthologies, journals and lecture series have addressed the phenomenon of acceleration: Anthologies: Rosa, *Fast*; Rosa/Scheuerman, *High*; Lash, Andrew Quick, and Richard Roberts; Monographs: Bauman; Eriksen; Harvey; Kern; Rosa, *Beschleunigung*; Sennett; Shove, Elizabeth, Frank Trentmann and Richard Wilk; Heuwinkel; Tomlinson; Virilio, *Futurism*; Virilio, *Polar Inertia*; Virilio, *Speed and Politics*; Journals: *Mobilities* (since March 2006); *Time and Society* (since 1992). These engagements not only explore the genesis and the (socio-cultural) effects of the second acceleratory wave but develop first theorizations. The research and the discourse that has been conducted in the context of the DFG *Schwerpunktprogramm Ästhetische Eigenzeiten: Zeit und Darstellung in der polychronen Moderne* (since 2012, Berlin) has been particularly influential for my own research.

In today's digital media landscape, where the world wide web not only embodies an unconceivably accelerated data flow but has moreover emerged as a democratic space where diverse practices and discourses co-exist and remembering has become a de-hierarchized and explorative (rather than an institutionalized) process, former media consumers recover "thousands of books that have been neglected, overlooked, forgotten, or stranded by changing tides in critical or popular taste" (*The Neglected Books Page*) on their individual blogs or on collaborative web pages such as the *Neglected Books Page*.[29] Asch's *The Office* and Borden's *Flamingo* were featured on this latter page in August 2006 and 2009, respectively; Waldo Frank's prose was here included in a list of 'rediscoveries' that was taken from David Madden's book of the same title (1971). Drawing on this material, the present thesis broadens and diversifies the scope of inquiry on the literature produced by American writers throughout the first decades of the twentieth century. Thereby, it provides a first retrospective systematization of the alternative practice that reveals itself in a comparative scrutiny of these three individual writers and their novels.

In this manner, this study carries forth the recovery work and canon reconfiguration on which modernist studies have thrived for the past decades. It puts another formerly little-recognized practice on our conceptual map of American modernisms. Not only conferences bearing such promising titles as *Alternative Modernisms* (Cardiff University, 2013) register the endeavor to open up the field and to make it more flexible to account for the greatly diverse modernisms that actually co-existed and cross-fertilized one another a century ago. In the same way, recent bulky anthologies protrude far beyond the avant-garde *Modernisms* to which Peter Nicholls, as well as Kathryne V. Lindberg and Joseph G. Kronick (*America's Modernisms*) still limited their corpus in 1995 and 1996, respectively. *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism* (ed. by Walter Kalaidjian), *A Concise Companion to Modernism* (ed. by David Bradshaw), *A Companion to the Modern American Novel 1900-1950* (ed. by John T. Matthews) and *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* (ed. by Peter Brooker et al.) all testify to the great spectrum of movements and practices which scholars now take into consideration. In literary studies alone, a great variety of modernisms have been recovered: for instance, regional or ethnic[30] variants, gendered modernisms such as middlebrow and sentimental modernisms[31] or, more recently, queer (undercurrents in) modernisms.[32]

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[29] On the emergence of a 'participatory culture' in today's media landscape, see for instance Jenkins or the essays collected in Michael Mandiberg's *Social Media Reader*.

The insightful recovery work others have conducted constitutes a major impetus for my own determination to re-claim another forgotten practice that can be deduced from the three 1920s' experimental novels about urban America. Many already reevaluated modernisms, in fact, intersect with this practice even though the latter represents a specific composition of stylistic, formal and thematic features that mark it as distinct. This is the case even though individuals who wrote alternate novels do not constitute (and did not form) an ethnic or regional movement (such as African-American modernism or the Fugitives and Southern Agrarians), nor did they share a gender or class background or a political orientation (such as the writers of middlebrow-, sentimental- or queer modernisms). Nathan Asch was a Polish émigré with leftist leanings and the son of the famous Jewish writer Sholem Asch who worked his first jobs on Wall Street before he decided to become a writer. Mary Borden was born into a wealthy family of Chicago entrepreneurs, was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* for her service for the French Red Cross and became a popular American novelist with strong feminist convictions while living in England and France. Waldo Frank was a Jewish-American intellectual who was inspired to write a number of cultural studies about American character formation in the aftermath of a divine visitation.

There exist no biographical connections between Asch, Borden and Frank, yet striking thematic and aesthetic overlaps can be discerned in their novels: Throughout the same decade,

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[30] In her 2006 study *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism*, Leigh Anne Duck shows how, by "exploring the temporal relationships between region and nation," writers of experimental fiction from the South, among them Erskine Caldwell, Zora Neale Hurston and William Faulkner, "recorded and responded to the paradoxically frenetic production of southern backwardness, which they placed in dialogue with equally assertive accounts of national progressiveness" (9). Four volumes of poetry written by Appalachian writers who were deeply engaged in the discourse on racial pluralism are in focus in Chris Green's 2009 study *The Social Life of Poetry: Appalachia, Race, and Radical Modernism*. Werner Sollors explores how the "cultural work of recasting the United States as a multiethnic country was undertaken by American ethnic writers" in his study *Ethnic Modernism* (13; cf. Hicks, *Great*). Christopher Schedler's study *Border Modernisms: Intercultural Readings in American Literary Modernism* (2002) explores the "aesthetic of border modernism" devised by both avant-gardist writers who "turned to the border to modernize the 'native' literary and cultural traditions of the Americas (i.e., Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather) as well as by writers who wrote "from the border" and "engaged with modernist theories and practices" (i.e., the Mexican writer Mariano Azuela, the Native American John Joseph Mathews and the Chicano Américo Paredes). See the anthology *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900-1950*, edited by Paul L. Karlstrom (1996) as well.

[31] These variants have grown out of the feminist re-conceptualization of the modernist canon, which was initiated by Shari Benstock's seminal study *Women of the Left Bank* in 1986 and followed by such groundbreaking studies as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Female Imagination and the Modernist Aesthetic* (1986) and *The War of Words* (1987), Bonnie Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism* (1989) or Marianne DeKoven's *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (1991). The more recent anthology edited by Scott, *Gender in Modernism* (2007), provides us with a large variety of primary material on the subject as well as with insightful introductions that have been contributed by leading scholars in the field. Middlebrow studies have moved the works by formerly neglected American women writers back into the focus for more than two decades (see especially Botshon/Goldsmith; Rubin). In 1991, Suzanne Clark' study *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* newly grouped women American writers and intellectuals such as Kay Boyle, Emma Goldman and Edna St. Vincent Millay as 'Sentimental Modernists.' On modernisms and gender, see for instance, *Difference in View* (1994), edited by Gabriele Griffin, the four-volume anthology *Gender and Modernism* (2008), edited by Bonnie Kime Scott, or Natalya Lusty and Julian Murphet's anthology *Modernism and Masculinity* (2014).

[32] See for instance Boone, Love, Renzen, Salvato or Schmidt as well as Elizabeth English's study *Lesbian Modernism*.

City Block, Flamingo and *The Office* presented their readers with three unique but comparable critical diagnoses of acceleration's long-term effects in urban America. In each of these novels, an individualized form of an 'aesthetic of in-betweenness,' as one might call it, is employed for this purpose – and aesthetic that combines 'fast and new' with 'old and slow' styles and narrative modes (e.g., metropolitan literary chronotopes, radical experiments vs. realism, sentimentalism, omniscient narrators). The retrospective conceptualization of this aesthetic on the basis of my engagement with forgotten experimental novels productively intersects with the work of scholars who have recently explored a similarly "unpredictable and unprecedented mix" of various, sometimes "contradictory traditions" in contemporary, relatively unacknowledged "hybrid poetry" (Swensen xxi). While I applaud that Amy Moorman Robbins intervened in 2014 to prove that this very aesthetic originated much earlier – "in the work of radical women poets from throughout the past century, poets who have created such mixings as part of a resistance to being fixed in any particular school or camp" and for the purpose of "contesting the dominant cultural order" (Robbins 1, 2) – my study goes even further afield. Building on Robbins' reappraisal of Gertrude Stein's hybrid mystery novel *Blood on the Dining Room Floor* (written in 1933), which was "perceived as a failure precisely because Stein was writing in the popular genre of detective fiction" (Robbins 14), the second part of this study discloses how a whole practice of prose writing was scolded and neglected by critics from different 'camps' because it contested the dominant cultural order of acceleration in texts that combine 'old/slow' with 'new/fast' styles and narrative forms. As I will demonstrate, this aesthetic of in-betweenness, too, was devised independently by male and female writers – Asch, Borden and Frank – as a "political strategy" (Robbins 2). In the work of these writers, such manifold mixings of 'old/slow' with 'new/fast' are geared toward a greater generative cause: they aim to criticize and to diagnose as well as to create a critical awareness and to trigger activity and change. Just as the experimental writers Robbins examines, these three writers were individually devising a hybrid aesthetic to "lay[] the groundwork for a new strain of avant-garde literary practice in which mass culture [i.e., traditional styles and narrative forms] is not to be eschewed or denounced but rather engaged and creatively reinvented" (Robbins 12).

As revisionist endeavors in modernist studies demonstrate, the tendency to hang on to traditional (realist; sentimental) forms, sets of tropes and rhetorical stances was more common at the heyday of modernism than even Robbins admits: For instance Suzanne Clark shows that 'sentimental modernists' such as Kay Boyle or Louise Bogan opposed the "reversal against the sentimental [which] helped to establish beleaguered avant-garde intellectuals as a discourse community" in their experimental texts (1). Also the Southern modernists whom Leigh A. Duck addresses in her study (i.e., Erskine Caldwell and Zora Neale Hurston) combined such traditional formulae as the southern grotesque, folklore, and gothic with experimental techniques for the purpose of producing "figurative explorations of regional time [...] [to] suggest[] the difficulties facing people who sought to understand relationships between modernization and tradition" (8, cf. 12, 85-86). Similarly, another prominent variant of Southern modernism, practiced in the 1920s by a group of white, Nashville-based intellectuals in the magazine *The Fugitive* and later by the literary writers among the so-called Southern Agrarians,[33] "merged cultural and artistic influences from the larger world of cultural modernism with traditional materials" (Brinkmeyer Jr. 150; cf. Duvall 253).

The alternate practice needs to be distinguished from these modernisms since it primarily grew out of individual writers' engagement with the phenomenon of acceleration, rather than with a specific region (the South); since it was not primarily informed by shared, for instance gender-related, concerns such as "recuperate[ing] woman's tradition" while "participating in a revolution against forms that included gender," as Clark summarizes the concerns of sentimental modernists (14). The Southern Agrarians and the alternate writers nonetheless had a similarly critical outlook on the phenomenon of acceleration.[34] Unlike the Agrarians, however, the alternate writers did not form a movement, nor did any of them take a sectionalist, categorically anti-modern and anti-urban stance (cf. Duvall); neither of them "look[ed] defensively about [...] in all directions" to fend off any influence of modern America or planned a "counter-revolution" to return to a pre-modern life, as a number of regionalist and fundamentalist movements did at the time (Ransom, "Reconstructed" 20, 26). Instead, each of them individually aimed to draw readers' attention to the detrimental effects of ubiquitous acceleration in order to inspire them to meet these effects in generative ways. For this purpose, the writers examined in this study confronted readers with critical diagnoses of urban life in modern America and they proposed three unique but comparable ways of managing modernity, of regaining control in the age of speed.

Looking back on the in-depth examination of this century-old, yet remarkably generative response to the first wave of acceleration, as it surfaces in *City Block*, *Flamingo* and *The Office*, the concluding chapter in this study will build a bridge between the first and the second waves of acceleration. It examines the relevance that these novels still have for our present time – a time at which the desire to build oases of slowness once again seems to emerge, yet in seemingly greater scale than it did during the 1920s, when the interventions by the alternate writers and other critical voices was largely subdued by the resounding discourse of acceleration in America.

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[33] For a discussion of the continuities and the differences between these two groups, see for instance Andrew Hook's essay "Fugitives and Agrarians."

[34] In their manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), the Agrarians for instance note: "The tempo of industrial life is fast, but that is not the worst of it; it is accelerating" (Ransom et al. xxvi).

This thesis takes part in the ongoing project of charting alternative modernisms, which is guided by historical evidence rather than long-standing categorizations or canonizations. The comprehensive reassessment of Asch, Borden and Frank as modern American fiction writers will demonstrate that revisionary endeavors in modernist studies have by no means lost their productive edge or their relevance: They continue to substantiate our understanding of the experimental wave that occurred in American writing around the turn to the twentieth century – its heterogeneity, its relation to other historical processes, the dynamic of in- and exclusion it engendered. Revisionary projects such as the present one moreover sensitize us to the diachronic topicality that many of the concerns experimental writers addressed about a century ago are once again gaining at our present moment.

PART I

DISCOURSES OF ACCELERATION IN THE UNITED STATES DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF ACCELERATION

II DISCOURSES OF ACCELERATION

> Plucked from the roof of a speeding train. Carried thousands of feet into the air on a rope. Dropped by her aeroplane hero into a lake. Surrounded by enemies in the wilderness. Saved by sliding down the walls of a canyon. Pursued in her daring leap for life.
>
> "*Ruth of the Rockies*." Pathe Advertisement. *Boston Daily Globe* 6 Oct. 1920

> The importance of the street in the city plan rests in the fact that it is the channel of all the ordinary means of public circulation and public service [...] and that only through a comprehensive, well-ordered system of main streets can the functions of the city be performed with economy and efficiency. [...] City planning means first of all adequate facilities for circulation.
>
> John Nolen. *New Ideals in the Planning of Cities, Towns, and Villages,* 1919 (47)

> Miss [Marianne] Moore accomplishes [...] a rapidity of movement. A poem such as "Marriage" is an anthology of transit. It is a pleasure that can be held firm only by moving rapidly from one thing to the next. It gives the impression of a passage through. There is a distaste for lingering [...]. It is a rapidity too swift for touch.
>
> William Carlos Williams. "Marianne Moore," 1925 (123)

It is certainly not an audacious claim that early moving pictures, turn-of-the-century city planning and American literary modernism are all historically and aesthetically part of what we call American modernity. To define the relation of these practices and the various 'products' they engendered more precisely, however, has turned out to be a much more complex task. For decades, scholars have, rather vaguely, asserted that certain parallels or similarities exist between them. The literary critic Claude-Edmonde Magny, for example, proposed in 1949 that the modernist "evolution of novelistic technique [was] the imitation, conscious or unconscious, of the techniques of the [medium] film" (3). In 1971, the modernist scholar Malcolm Bradbury claimed that the literary avant-garde's experimentation "was often conducted in close relation to the forces of change in American life, picking up its detail – its new manners, its new people, its machines and skyscrapers" ("Style" 16). In 1995, the film scholar Tom Gunning argued that early American filmmakers, with their "new aesthetic of attractions," "responded" to the experiential quality of the nation's metropolitan centers ("Aesthetic" 122, 126) and five years later, Nicholas Daly, another film scholar, described machine technology and early film's relation in terms of a "special affinity" (292). The programmatic statements by contemporary actors that open this chapter, however, suggest that the similarities that exist between these contemporaneous practices and 'products' cannot only be attributed to processes of imitation or adaptation. These statements illustrate that various ambitious actors of the day opted for descriptions that emphasize the temporal quality of the practices and 'products' they sought to promote, respectively. They refer to all of them in terms of acceleration. With these exemplary statements, I suggest, the production company Pathe, the city planner John Nolen and the American literary modernist William Carlos Williams participated in an overarching discourse of acceleration, in which speed-up had become the new norm and imperative.

On the basis of this insight and taking impetus from scholars such as Warren Buckland, who complain that critics (in this case Gunning) use "tentative language ('inspire,' 'congruence')" that seems to be "based on indeterminate assumptions" in describing "the link between early cinema and [other phenomena of] modernity" (52), the following three chapters will demonstrate that acceleration emerged as a norm and imperative within an overarching discourse of acceleration as well as in the domains of early American film, city planning, metropolitan architecture, American business and avant-garde letters around the turn of the century. My scrutiny of historical source material from all of these domains will disclose that the reason for this roughly simultaneous embrace of acceleration was not alone that ambitious actors in these fields were affected by their secular Protestantism or the fear of falling behind in the acceleration circle, as Rosa's theorizations suggest. My analytical work will evidence that a dynamic of acceleration emerged on the level of discourse in all of these domains as actors began to base their acts and value judgements on the new American value of speed-up. Within domain-specific discourses of acceleration, which the sum of these acts constituted, speed-up was established as a norm and imperative for actors participating in each field, respectively: actors who had accelerated their practices and 'products' were praised and those who failed to do the same were met with rebuke. Every time an actor announced his newest advance for the purpose of self-validation, others were alerted that they needed to increase the velocity of their practices and 'products' once more, too, to succeed in the American race of recognition.

This first part of the study builds the foundation upon which the intentional failure performed by Nathan Asch, Mary Borden and Waldo Frank can be assessed in the second part of this study: This first part examines the strategic ways in which various actors of the day operated within domain-specific discourses as well as within the overarching discourse of acceleration to validate themselves as quintessentially modern, scientific, American and fast(er). This will finally enable me to elucidate how Asch, Borden and Frank marked themselves as authors of a different kind through discursive 'self-distancing' as well as how and why they sought to implement a generative effect with their novels in the 1920s. It is my contention that the emergence of the alternate practice of modern American prose writing can be understood as a reaction to the dynamic of validation and reproach that materialized within the overarching discourse as well as, more generally, to the norms and imperatives upon which this dynamic was based in the first place. In the 1920s, Asch, Borden and Frank set out independently to disillusion their readers about the effects of acceleration on individual and social life in America and to animate them to take generative countermeasures.

II.A THE NEXUS OF EARLY FILM AND ACCELERATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Ninety years after New York audiences had attended the first public exhibition of Thomas Edison's moving picture projector, the *vitascope*,[35] at Koster and Bial's Music Hall, Tom Gunning challenged the long-standing contention that very early film was merely a primitive precursor of narrative film.[36] Drawing on this groundbreaking notion, I will argue in this first chapter that early American filmmakers established the 'Cinema of Attractions,' as Gunning labels it,[37] by establishing acceleration as the key principle of this new medium and entertainment format. My examination of contemporary advertisements and reviews in the first part of this chapter will substantiate this claim and it will furthermore provide first insights into the discourse of acceleration, as it materialized in the emergent domain of American film: It will expose that temporal criteria were used in celebrations of the Cinema of Attractions as a technology, a practice of film exhibition and a method of arranging content. Shifting the focus to transitional-era and early classical film, I will historically expand my argument in the second part of this chapter. Here, I examine more closely how acts of self-validation, extrinsic validation and extrinsic regulation set a dynamic of acceleration into motion, which drove everyone within this field to ever greater velocity.

II.A.1 ACCELERATION AND THE BIRTH OF THE POPULAR MOVING PICTURE

During the first wave of speed-up, when the engineer was celebrated as an American hero in newspapers and was featured as the new role model in children's literature (cf. Tichi 97-103), ambitious actors in the domain of photography set out to speed up their practice and 'products' as well. The new medium of film, which they created, constitutes a form of technical acceleration. It grew out of several experimental attempts to speed up photography, which aimed to advance the practice and the medium for the new century. Between the 1830s and the 1880s, various advances of this kind drastically reduced exposure times from 15 minutes (Daguerreotype) to a 1/1000 of a second (cf. Borscheid 308, 313; Danius 166), thus enabling photographers to "assert" their "will over the natural environment:" With each quickly-taken photograph, they were now able to arrest the incessant flow of "internal time, the time of active living" – the "*durée*," as Henri Bergson labeled it in 1889 (Gillies 102; cf. Danius 172). The series of inventions that lead up to the roughly simultaneous introduction of several projection devices, which were based on penny arcade attractions such as Edison's

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[35] Edison Manufacturing Company obtained the right to produce the *phantoscope*, which had been invented by Charles Francis Jenkins and Thomas Armat, as well as the films for it on January 15, 1896. It was agreed that the invention should henceforth be credited to Edison and that it should be marketed as the *vitascope* – for commercial reasons. The first exhibition of the *vitascope* took place on April 23, 1895 (cf. Musser, *Emergence* 109–11).

[36] See Gunning's elaborations on the 'continuity model' in "Now You See It, Now You Don't" (41-42).

[37] The evolution of this term, especially through Gunning's cooperation with André Gaudreault at the time, is well-documented by film scholars and Gunning himself (see Gunning, "Attractions;" Strauven).

kinetoscope and Herman Casler's *mutoscope* (Grieveson/Krämer, "Film" 31), indicates that the process of change (i.e., knowledge formation) in the field became faster. At the same time, the projectors developed during this watershed moment in film history embodied a form of technological acceleration: they transported photographic images through the machine at a fast pace to (mechanically, and later electrically) turn them into 'moving' pictures: to (re)animate (i.e., accelerate) photographic still images to 'quasi-*durée*' on screen. By using such labels as *vitascope* or, since 1896, *projecting kinetoscope* for early film projectors, an ambitious actor such as Edison also rhetorically identified speed(-up) as the medium's key characteristic from the start, thus establishing its (market) value in modern America: The etymology of these labels – Latin *vita* (Engl. life), Greek *kineto* (Engl. 'movement') and Greek *skopos* (Engl. 'to look') – indicates that the projector is specially designed to transform still images into life-like, moving pictures.

In the U.S.A., where Frederick Jackson Turner had just declared the closure of the territorial frontier, the new kind of progress that Edison and others were making as they constructed moving machines to project moving pictures was greatly applauded by reviewers and audiences alike. In an article that covered the launch event of a rival projection device, the *American Biograph* Herman Casler introduced in 1896, for instance, a commentator mentions that the "actual movement of life [on screen was] realistic to a degree positively startling." Furthermore, he explicitly addresses Casler's pioneering in technological acceleration, which made it possible to record and project the film in the first place: "To realize the rapidity of this motion" in the projected material, the commentator proposes, "try and see how far you can count in a second." Drawing the reader's attention to the attraction of speed technology, he notes that "there must be a camera [...] to take photographs at the same ratio" (qtd. in Pratt 20).[38] Similarly, an 1892 article in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* reports that the "large audience," which had gathered for the first demonstration of Edison's *vitascope*, "testified [...] by the heartiest kind of applause" that the machine represented a true "novelty," hence a noteworthy innovation in the fast-advancing field of photography (qtd. in Pratt 16). Only two months later, the Lumière brothers' *cinématographe* received the same positive response in New York newspapers when it was introduced at Keith's Union Square Theater.[39] As these early press responses demonstrate, the unprecedented speed at which recording and projecting technology operated and reanimated still pictures to quasi-*durée* on screen elicited praise within a larger discursive context: The allure of technological acceleration, it seems, was instrumental in popularizing the new medium among contemporary audiences as well as within the overarching discourse of acceleration, as it registered in American general-interest newspapers at the time (cf. Kirby 2–3).

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[38] Note that the "first locomotive constructed in England by the engineer R. Trevithic (1801) began life as a fairground phenomenon, hidden from the casual glance and viewed on purchase of a ticket [as well]. Inside this type of circus the machine performed for the surprised curiosity of the Londoners who crowded around for a ride" (Prato/Trivero 34).

[39] See the notices "The Cinematographe at Keith's" and "Keith's at Union Square" reprinted in Pratt (16-17).

The presentational mode used at the 1896 launch event of the *vitascope* in New York City substantiates the claim that ambitious American actors in the domain of early film capitalized on the quality of unprecedented speed – in this case an experience of unprecedented velocity – to establish the medium in modern America. The audience was confronted with a large number of short films that were "followed in quick succession [by] a scene from [Charles Hale Hoyt's popular 1883 play] A MILK WHITE FLAG in which a couple of dozen people appeared; a serpentine dance with all the colored calcium effects, and an amusing picture showing an argument between John Bull and Uncle Sam" (qtd. in Pratt 16).[40] In the show, the technique of functional reduction, common in American vaudeville, was applied: One of the short filmic attractions was a version of Hoyt's play, in which all dispensable plot elements had been eliminated and only one particularly eventful scene was retained ('a couple of dozen people appeared'). The accelerant technique of moving suddenly and quickly from one short novelty picture to another, very different one (a drama, a colored actuality picture, a comedy) came to common use among exhibitors of very early film. It was used as a means to amplify the audience's experiential pace by increasing the number of 'events' that each viewer encountered during the show, as compared to a traditional performance of a play for instance.

The advent of specially-established exhibition spaces (Nickelodeons) since 1905 contributed greatly to the popularization of the new medium (cf. Kirby 33). Just as Edison did at the launch event of the vitascope, exhibitors at Nickelodeon theaters adopted the presentational mode of American vaudeville, where moving pictures had been shown previously.[41] They constructed Nickelodeon schedules as a frantic cascade of different short films. This arrangement, it seems, was used to bring the new entertainment format up to speed with the increasing pace at which sensorial stimulation and change occurred in other domains of metropolitan life at the time. In the November 23, 1907 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, an article appeared in which a former film exhibitor notes that he and his colleagues "used to give just flashes – an engine chasing to a fire, a base-runner sliding home, a charge of cavalry" (qtd. in Pratt 50). Through this technique of increasing the presentational speed (i.e., the rate at which change occurred on screen), film exhibitors amplified life's pace for their modern audiences: they could experience very much in very little time whenever they visited a Nickelodeon. In *The Illustrated American*, a patron of early film published a comment in which he sympathetically confirms that "the emotion produced upon the spectator is far more vivid [...] because of the startling suddenness with which it [each moving picture] is conjured up and changed" (qtd. in Pratt 17). This exemplary response illustrates that a decisive factor for the new medium's appeal was that it catered to modern individuals who simply enjoyed this new, fast entertainment format – not only to those who were plagued by '*Verpassensangst*' or the feeling that they were falling behind on the 'slipping slopes' of constant change if they let their pace of life decrease after a busy day at the office (see fn. 9):[42] "a new and urgent need for stimuli was met by the [medium of early] film," as Walter Benjamin notes in his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire (328).

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[40] Although it is important to acknowledge that the short forms that constituted the Cinema of Attractions were contingent on "technical limitations," Ruth Mayer is right to point out that the "relevance of short forms in modernity hinges closely on the tendencies toward acceleration in knowledge formation" as well (616).

[41] Exhibition spaces of early film included community halls, fairgrounds or amusement parks (Grieveson/Krämer, "Film" 34).

The 'flashes' listed by the former film exhibitor in the *Saturday Evening Post* ('an engine chasing to a fire, a base-runner sliding home, a charge of cavalry') furthermore indicate that exhibitors at the time were aware that diegetic speed would appeal to modern American audiences – and perhaps compensate for the waning novelty of the projector as a machine of acceleration. A large share of the diverse attractions presented to patrons at storefront theaters at the time in fact featured fast-moving subjects (e.g., a base-runner or cavalry) or speed technologies (e.g., a fire engine).[43] According to Lynne Kirby, "out of some 2,500 films produced [by American Mutoscope & Biograph] from 1896 until 1902, several hundred were travel and scenic films, of which most involved a train or some aspect of the railroad" (19).[44]

The portrayal of unprecedented (technological) speed as well as the praise that these portrayals commonly elicited in newspapers evidence that actors in the domain of early film were aware that acceleration had become a value that was shared by many American patrons and critics. An affirmative embrace of machine-age speed seemed to guarantee critical acclaim and financial profit within the overarching discourse of acceleration. Short pictures that featured a fast-moving machine and subjected patrons to an experience of speed – for instance so-called 'phantom rides' taken by a camera on the front of a train – were enthusiastically received:

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[42] With this reading, I contest the notion that "the lust of the eye" or a predisposition of "the new proletariat" conditioned a "modern *obsession* with [...] speed" (Gunning, "Attractions" 126; Singer, *Melodrama* 96; Gunning, "Now" 44, emphasis added) as well as (Marxist) assessments which propose that the Cinema of Attractions "*molded viewers* to [...] implement Taylorism" (Albera 132, emphasis added), mended people's exhausted nerves or shielded off hyperstimulation. "[B]ecause man is able to choose and even create his environment to some extent," Annemone Ligensa adequately notes in her critique of such assessments, "it seems more likely that the cultural environment reflects the perceptual preferences of the majority of its inhabitants" since the "usual response to [...] exhaustion is not to seek more stimulation, but rest" (170, 168).

[43] As Gunning points out, filmic attractions ranged from "current events (parades, funerals, sporting events); scenes of everyday life (street scenes, children playing, laborers at work); arranged scenes (slapstick gags, a highlight from a well-known play, a romantic tableau) [...] [to] camera tricks" ("Now" 43; cf. Butsch 23; Hansen, *Babel and Babylon* 61).

[44] For one of the earliest examples, see *A Race for a Kiss* (Walton Studios, 1904), which dramatizes the new technological speed by staging a race between a horse and a car.

> The spectator [...] was a passenger on a phantom train that whirled him through space at nearly a mile a minute. [...] There was nothing to indicate motion save the shining vista of tracks that was eaten up irresistibly, rapidly, and the disappearing panorama of banks and fences. [...] [F]ar away the bright day became a spot of darkness. That was the mouth of the tunnel, and toward it the spectator was hurled as if a fate was behind him. ("A Phantom Ride" 6)

This vivid 1897 recount of the screening of an American Mutoscope & Biograph phantom ride in *The Phonoscope*, an American monthly exclusively dedicated to inventions in sound and sight entertainment, focuses on the rate at which the picture stimulates viewers' senses: the 'vista of tracks' is 'eaten up irresistibly, rapidly' and the 'panorama of banks and fences' is quickly 'disappearing' on screen. Not only the popularity of the phantom ride genre as such but the remarkable focus on experiential and diegetic speed in this account, too, indicate that a discourse of acceleration was emerging in the domain of early American film. Within this discourse, (experiential) speed-up was established as a criterion that distinguished a successful filmic production, exhibitor or producer from a failed, decelerated one. On July 4, 1896, an article appeared in the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, celebrating a film about a mail train as the "best picture" (qtd. in Pratt 17) and only four months later, a review in the Rochester *Post-Express* called a phantom ride "the most celebrated picture ever taken" (qtd. in Pratt 20).

As the first part of this chapter demonstrates, actors engaged in the domain of early film – inventors as well as exhibitors and production companies – established acceleration as the key element of their new medium and entertainment format at the end of the nineteenth century. In view of the fact that American pioneering was just reconfigured as a commitment to the conquering of new, temporal frontiers, and acceleration had emerged as a modern American value, it becomes evident that self-validation within a greater discursive context was the primary purpose of these actors. It informed their choice of labels for their machines, their preference for thrilling subjects and their technique of confronting audiences with a sequence of thrilling filmic flashes. The critical responses examined so far evidence that this strategy of self-validation produced a marked effect within the overarching discourse of acceleration. Many reporters focused their responses in general-interest newspapers on the new medium's temporal aspects: technological innovation and acceleration, the thrilling content of a moving picture and the high rate of stimulation to which an effective assembly of short, unconnected filmic attractions subjects audiences. Thereby, they not only helped to institute acceleration as a norm and imperative in the domain of early American film – they also began to validate the medium within an overarching discourse of acceleration, which was just emerging in America.

The second part of this chapter will concentrate on the dynamic of acceleration that emerged within the domain-specific discourse of acceleration when it became common among actors in the field to base their acts of self-validation, extrinsic validation and extrinsic regulation on the new value of speed-up. These acts generated a form of normative micro-power[45] on the level of discourse: Extrinsic validations of actors (or their films) who had implemented (experiential) velocity in a new or again speedier way instituted acceleration as a norm and imperative in the domain of American film, thereby subtly impelling other filmmakers to resynchronize their own practices and pictures as well. The extrinsic regulation met by actors or films that did not comply with the new norms had the same effect.

II.A.2 THE DYNAMIC OF ACCELERATION IN THE DOMAIN OF EARLY AMERICAN FILM

In 1911, an article titled "Lessons from [the Showman] Lyman Howe" appeared in the moving picture trade journal *Motography*. Hinting at the fact that Howe changes his program less frequently than exhibitors at Nickelodeon theaters, the commentator asks the following question within it: "How does he [Howe] get away with" charging up to a dollar for a two-hour show in which "he changes his films but once a week" (4)?[46] To answer this question, the commentator refers to Howe's thrill-packed variety program, in which "lions roar, his women scream, [and] his machinery has its appropriate hum or rattle" (4, 5). He also puts import on the grand finale, a phantom ride called "The Runaway Train," which, he suggests, intensifies the show's experiential pace for the audience:

> His projecting machine is so geared that it may be speeded up until the train (on which the spectator is supposed to be travelling) appears to be running down grades and around corners at a frightful speed. Then, at last, it hurls itself down a steep grade, straight at an obstruction on the track. There is a flash of blinding white light on the screen (from the spot-light) the effect man fires a pistol – and the show is over. Simple, but very effective. (5)

As this passage illustrates, the commentator identifies Howe's 'simple' yet most 'effective' technique to generate experiential velocity as a decisive factor for the show's appeal: Howe hastens the projector's operation, thus speeding up the succession of visual stimulants on the diegetic level.[47] At the climactic moment, he enriches the resultant fast experiential *Takt*[48] with yet more auditory and visual stimulants ("efficient sound effects" such as the shot; the flash of light).[49] Read through the lens of temporality, the commentator's analysis of Howe's ingenuity in providing spectators with a cascade of stimulants without wasting material, time or energy ('simple but very effective'), appears as an act through which the author sought to authorize the showman's practice. With this act, he invited *Motography* readers (exhibitors, producers and patrons) to recognize Howe as an American pioneer in technical acceleration, too.

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[45] I borrow this conception of power from Michael Foucault: regulatory micro-power operates "not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control" on the level of discourse (*History* 96, 81, 102).

[46] Nickelodeons capitalized on the appeal of accelerated change by replacing their program at short intervals. While the vaudeville pioneer Keith still advertised a weekly change of program in 1905 (see the program reprinted on page 54 in Snyder), "[f]requent[, that is daily,] changes of the picture bills are necessary" at the Nickelodeon, an article in *The Billboard* declared a year later (qtd. in Pratt 43). In 1907, the trade journal *The Moving Picture World and View Photographer* similarly noted: "In this day and age [...] the manager of picture shows is kept busy thinking up some new and novel additions to his entertainment in order that he may prove a winner with the show-going public" (qtd. in Pratt 45).

[47] Only one year after the *cinématographe* was first exhibited in New York City, *The Post-Express* (Rochester, N.Y.) celebrated the projector running backwards as "a curious novelty," hence an innovation in speed-technology that "everyone who has seen the *cinématographe* will be desirous to witness" (qtd. in Pratt 18). The practice of decreasing the speed of cranking the camera (i.e., 'undercranking') was adopted by American companies such as Biograph as another technique of filmic acceleration in the early twentieth century (cf. Gunning, "Unseen" 364). Writing in 1920, Edwin Schallert identified undercranking as a technique used by filmmakers for the "purpose" of "increasing of the tempo, the producing of an extraordinary thrill in what was happening that would make everybody doubly happy" (51). On the (standardization of the) speed of projection, see Kevin Brownlow (1980).

The commentator furthermore equipped his article in *Motography* with a regulative function, which illustrates that a significant driving force of acceleration emerged on the level of discourse, sparking adaptation and competition in the field. In both the title "Lessons by Lyman Howe" as well as in the concluding sentence, he most forcefully implements it: "We have asserted before, and we say again, any exhibitor with enough nerve and average brains could [...] fill his house every performance. When will somebody start the order of things" (5)? This question functions as a directive. With it, the commentator addresses 'divergent' showmen, urging them to follow Howe's example. As this article demonstrates, the fact that many actors in the field of early moving pictures, such as Lyman Howe, felt impelled to invent new techniques to accelerate their products and practices, cannot only be attributed to actors' internalized urge to avoid falling behind on the 'slipping slopes,' as Rosa suggests (see fn. 9). At the same time, and perhaps more directly so, the incentive to accelerate materialized for actors within the discourse on American film (exhibition) when commentators in domain-specific publications began to adopt a rhetoric of acceleration and based their verdicts on the value of speed-up in its three distinct forms: technical acceleration (e.g., undercranking), the acceleration of the audience's pace of life (through techniques such as undercranking) and the acceleration of change (i.e., innovation). Self-consciously modern and American critics of the day not only valorized the application of techniques of acceleration in American film (exhibition). In so doing, these actors more or less directly articulated their misgivings about all those unwilling to revolutionize their practice as well. The dynamic of acceleration materialized on the level of discourse; it was fueled by the discursive micro-power that was generated by all the discursive acts which impelled everyone in the field to act according to the new norm and imperative of acceleration.

Another dimension of this emergent dynamic of acceleration comes into view in the article on Lyman Howe: Parenthetically, the commentator mentions that Lyman Howe himself actively partook in the discourse of acceleration: Howe promotes the novel quality of his show in advertisements and press notices to "convince[] the public that his pictures are

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[48] I borrow this term from Ludwig Klages, who differentiates between organic/natural '*Rhythmus*' and '*Takt*,' which he defines as a controlled outcome of "the rational, ordering and segmenting activity of the intellect," hence a form of technical acceleration (Cowan 231; cf. Klages 14-15, 17).

[49] An article from *The Moving Picture World and View Photographer* declared already in 1907 that sound effects had become a novelty in film entertainment (qtd. in Pratt 45).

different and more wonderful" than others ("Lessons" 5). Historically, the fact that Howe promoted himself is hardly remarkable – manufacturer-consumer advertising was thriving since the mid-nineteenth century.[50] In the present study, however, the fact that Howe himself used the new American value of speed-up (i.e., the novelty of the subjects and the thrill of the diegetic action) in his advertisements to promote himself as an American speed-pioneer demonstrates that Howe was participating programmatically within the discourse that was emerging in his own domain: he was pursuing a strategy of self-validation with these discursive acts. "Advertisements present us with messages prepared by [...] the businesspeople who advertise and their collaborators [...] according to their combined notions about their audiences, how best to communicate to them, and to what purpose," as Pamela W. Laird points out (38). In American film advertising, a specific stylistic and rhetoric trend comes into view which not only reveals that advertisers felt that speed-up was becoming what the great majority of American film patrons demanded. This trend reveals, too, that acts of self-validation, as they co-occurred with discursive acts of extrinsic validation and extrinsic regulation, generated a dynamic of acceleration on the level of discourse. Actors who had accelerated their practices and/or forged new forms of technical acceleration were rewarded with praise, yet each time a competitor publicly announced their new advances in speed-up (and was praised for it) they were alerted that they needed to increase the velocity of their practices and products even further to defend their lucrative position in the avant-garde of American film.

The need to constantly accelerate must have seemed even more pressing since those who failed to do so were publicly scolded. Even Edison was attacked for failing to use the accelerant technique of cross-cutting to implement a greater rate of change. In 1909, a commentator cuttingly noted in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* that one of his films "would have been satisfactory also if a little ingenuity with a pair of scissors had been exercised by cutting the long parlor scene into short ones and alternating them with outside street scenes, so as to carry the two simultaneous actions along logically." Otherwise, "much time [is] being taken" for no purpose (qtd. in Pratt 60). The commentator bases his verdict on the speed that the technique cross-cutting could implement in a film through an intertwining of various narrative strands.

Already a cursory look at the advertisements that appeared in periodical publications within the domain of early film reveals that American producers of projection machinery capitalized on the very qualities which reviewers and spectators had applauded when the medium was first introduced: constant innovation, novelty and technological acceleration. In an advertisement from 1900, for instance, the company American Biograph claims "We Show Twice as Many Pictures Per Second" (qtd. in Pratt 18).[51] An advertisement for the American Projectograph, which appeared in *Moving Picture World* on September 28, 1907, uses the same temporal logic and it furthermore illustrates the dynamic of acceleration that materialized on the level of discourse particularly well: Within it, Chas E. Dressler & Co. promote their new machine not only by underlining that its operative speed has been accelerated so as to project a stable image at all times. To provide further evidence for their machine's value, they additionally include an act of extrinsic validation that was provided to them by a fellow American speed-pioneer: They reprint a "LETTER OF APPRECIATION" by a certain W.A. Page in the ad. In this letter, Page identifies himself as "a practical machinist and mechanical engineer" and praises the great 'efficiency' of the machine (i.e., its way of operating without any waste of material, time or energy). The extrinsic validation Page himself evidently sought to elicit by mentioning his profession is granted by the company in a remarkable (and remarkably public) way: Chas E. Dressler & Co. exhibits the benevolent letter by this expert of acceleration in their ad. In doing so, the company appropriates Page's letter for its own effort of self-validation and it identifies the machinist and engineer as a modern authority who epitomizes, upholds and recognizes the new American value of speed. The advertisement for the American Projectograph illustrates that an escalating dynamic of acceleration emerged on the level of discourse as various ambitious actors began to validate themselves and others as successful speed pioneers. Moreover, it demonstrates that the qualities of 'efficiency,'[52] 'speed-up' and 'Americanness' were rhetorically intertwined ever more tightly in this process. Within the domain-specific discourse of acceleration, the competence to operate in a faster or in a more efficient way (e.g., by shortening pauses) became an *American* self-attribution. Speed and efficiency became distinctly *American* qualities.

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[50] See Pamela Walker Laird's study *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (1998) for a survey of the transformation from retail/wholesale marketing to branded manufacturer-consumer marketing in the second half of the nineteenth century.

HOW TO BE(COME) SUCCESSFUL IN THE AMERICAN FILM BUSINESS: PATHE'S SELF-VALIDATION

The case of the French production company Pathé allows deeper insights into the regulatory power that materialized as the domain-specific discourse evolved in this manner. At the same time, it reveals that even 'divergent' actors could rise – or, rather, be discursively elevated – to fame in modern America if only they capitalized on the new norm and imperative of acceleration in their self-validational advances.

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[51] In 1911, an advertisement for the *Motiograph* by the Optical Enterprise Manufacturing Company even combined the promise of technical acceleration with quicker innovation: Presenting their newest accelerative technique, the "quick rewind from main crank with instantaneous magazine shift," to potential buyers in *Motion Picture News*, the company claimed that they "lead[], [while] others follow" because they frequently improve their appliances (15 Apr., 1911).

[52] The term 'efficiency' was often used synonymously with the term 'acceleration' since, besides an economic use of energy and material, it designates a person's or a machine's economic use of time resources – their speed.

Such a strategy was successfully implemented by Pathé when the rhetorical intertwinement of Americanness, speed and efficiency was reinforced in debates on motion pictures' ideological function, specifically their potential to assist "the construction of an 'American' identity" during the 1910s (Abel 202, cf. 197). In this context, Pathé came under attack for promoting foreign morals and for being "slow and uninteresting compared to [...] American film" ("Moving Picture Field" 6; cf. Abel 204, 198-99). During the commercial organization of the American film business (distribution systems, etc.) since 1908, Pathé's success had rested on their competence to technically accelerate their production. With an efficient system of (simultaneous) production, they had met the rising demand of novel pictures for the full-time schedules and the daily "turnover of subject matter" at Nickelodeon theaters (Musser, "Moving" 99; cf. Butsch 17; Grieveson/Krämer, "Storytelling" 78; Gunning, "Now" 42; Singer, "Manhattan" 119). As their weekly output-rate had climbed from six films in late 1906 up to an average of eight to twelve in 1908, Pathé had taken the lead in the speed of production during the first years of the Nickelodeon craze (Abel 185-86, 190) – and had promoted itself accordingly.[53] This, however, did not save the company from being attacked for producing allegedly slow and un-American pictures during the 1910s.

As the novel appeal of the Cinema of Attractions began to wane in the teens, American filmmakers developed novel techniques of speed-up and invented ever more thrilling storylines to sustain their films' popular appeal. Film scholars agree that American directors such as D.W. Griffith renewed the value of the medium since about 1907/08 by combining thrill-saturated plots with accelerating editing techniques (crosscutting, point-of-view shots or flashbacks): "the sensual rhythm of the editing, the brevity of shots combined with intense action (the speeding locomotive, thieves breaking through doorways) [...] create a visual experience of sharp alternations triggering a heightened sensual, physical excitement," Gunning notes in retrospect ("Systematizing" 22; cf. Kirby 53; Singer, *Melodrama* 129, 93). Acceleration persisted as a distinctive feature of transitional-era and early classical American film, as ambitious actors devised novel and more effective techniques of implementing speed within their longer, narrative films. Consequently, the practice of moving picture production was stylized in domain-specific publications as a specialized practice that prospered because it optimized both its production processes and its products on the basis of scientific analyses and careful planning. In 1909, an article appeared in the *Moving Picture World*, certifying that Kalem Company's "new offices and factory" are "a model of neatness and efficiency" ("Kalem" 470).[54] A 1911 article in *The Nickelodeon* evokes the same qualities of professionalization and efficiency engineering to validate American Vitagraph's "splendid modern plant" as "a model institution," which employs "thoroughly drilled experts" to make them "capable and efficient:" "[e]verybody works in perfect accord and harmony, thus eliminating friction" ("The Vitagraph Personnel" 9).[55]

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[53] In December 1907, Pathé declared that it had doubled its daily output to about 230,000 feet of footage (Abel 188) and only a year later, Biograph announced that it would re-synchronize its output to "a regular weekly supply of from 12 to 20 reels of splendid new subjects" as well (qtd. in Abel 192). The sheer variety in subjects, genres and length that Pathé offered, according to Abel, "was perfectly suited for the nickelodeons, which demanded variety and novelty as well as increasingly frequent changes in their programs" (186). In the 1910s, the same was still required from new production companies such as Goldwyn, which "attempt[ed] to stamp each production with a distinctive and appropriate something which no other story would call forth," as Kenneth McGowan affirmatively noted in 1917 (667).

A double-page advertisement by the American Film Company that appeared on July 8, 1922 in the *Exhibitors Trade Review* not only illustrates that self- and time-conscious American film companies continued to capitalize on their new techniques of acceleration still in the 1920s. It reveals, too, that these companies persistently signaled that they abide by the imperatives of speed and constant innovation. The American Film Company draws attention to the rate at which it releases new pictures by crowding the double page with no less than fifteen short advertising blurbs, each for an individual film. In nine of these blurbs, the advertiser moreover compresses the respective film into a compact sequence of interjections, which evokes the fast *Takt* at which discrete diegetic stimuli appear in the picture: "Thrills! – Action! – Suspense!" In other blurbs, for instance for the film *Quick Action*, short descriptions, replete with enumerations of thrills and promises of fast-paced action, are used for the same purpose: "A Speedy Comedy-Drama with a laugh a minute! Not a dull moment in the five acts! Suspense does not lag a minute! Between pick-pockets, hold-ups, boxing matches, treasure hunting and the outwitting of the crooks in the Treasure Vaults, there is action enough for two features." As this quote illustrates, the American Film Company wasted no time and space on the page for its aggressive act of self-validation.

To compete successfully with such self-consciously 'American' companies, Pathe did not only establish an American production branch in 1910 and lost the *accent aigu* in the company name (cf. Abel 206). Additionally, it began to market itself as a company dedicated to American speed-pioneering in the modern age, promoting its films as distinctly American, fast and novel. The company for instance produced westerns and claimed to have brought this most American of genres up to speed with the taste of modern American audiences. In an advertisement that appeared in the March 27, 1926 issue of *Motion Picture News*, Pathe for instance promises exhibitors that their six 'Leo Maloney' westerns will help them to attract American audiences who wish to maintain a high speed of life after work (i.e., a high rate of stimulation): "For fast beating pulses, and thrill a minute action, these are the pictures for you." Another double-page advertisement, which was printed in the September 29, 1907 issue, already estabished the laudable American and fast quality of Pathe westerns: More than half the advertisement is taken up by a color illustration of Harry Carey, who is speeding a carriage (with a lady in it) through the prairie while being chased by a number of riders. Speed lines distort the depiction, underlining the spectacular velocity of the diegetic action. The text in the advertisement meanwhile combines common denominators of Americanness (i.e., the common man, frontier spirit) with modern American values (i.e., experiential speed). As these exemplary advertisements illustrate, Pathe stylized itself as a self- and time-conscious expert in the production of thrill-saturated pictures for America – an expert who manages to combine modern temporal pioneering in the art of film making with the nostalgic, yet thrilling icons and plots of the previous, territorial phase of American pioneering. The company's strategy to embrace American themes and to increase their pictures' speed of diegetic action as well as their scheme to capitalize upon these qualities in their advertisements proved effective. A 1922 commentary in the *Exhibitors Herald,* for instance, acknowledges the "strength of purpose" with which Pathe has "progressed steadily [...] toward perfection of technic" ("Short Subjects Mean Money" 59).[56] With its endeavor of 'self-Americanization' amply validated by prominent trade presses, Pathe was confident to boast of its expertise in producing distinctly American, hence fast-paced, formats in an advertisement for the serial *Hurricane Hutch*: "Pathe knows that they want action and thrills, thrills, thrills" (*Exhibitors Trade Review* 1 Oct. 1921).

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[54] Lawrence Howe is right to claim that "[w]hat has been ignored with respect to film is that Taylor's immediate successors in the field applied his principles via motion picture technology" (50). Nevertheless, I find it noteworthy that this took place years before Taylor's *Scientific Management* was published in 1911.

[55] As the norm of acceleration gradually and ever more strongly merged with the ideal of professionalization and applied science, the trade journal *Moving Picture World* repeatedly emphasized between 1907 and 1909 that is was necessary to educate operators in specific schools, which award a 'certificate of efficiency' to graduates (cf. "An Operators' League;" Goss; "What are the Best Steps"). Serially published "Lessons for the Operator" meanwhile compelled operators to keep their "plant" up to scientific standards lest "efficiency is decreased" and reviews applauded film theaters which abided by these norms (134; cf. "Chicago Heavy Picture Rentals;" "The Knickerbocker").

The serial was an American craze format through which Pathe was able to validate itself within the modern entertainment landscape. The format itself was particularly suited for this purpose because it allowed a relatively stable fan base to materialize for the first time (cf. Stamp 102). To cultivate the latter and to thus elicit extrinsic validation on a permanent basis, Pathe capitalized on acceleration, most conspicuously by naming one of their serials *Speed*. In *Film Daily*'s September 10, 1922 issue, Pathe placed an advertisement in which it boasts that "[e]verything has been subordinated to the idea of crowding it [*Speed*] with action." In this manner, Pathe suggests that *Speed* even overhauls their previous serial *Hurricane Hutch* (1921), featuring the "'thrill-a-minute' stunt king" Charles Hutchinson (*Exhibitors Herald* 2 Sept.

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[56] In the same issue, Pathe's Sales Manager, its Short Subjects Sales Manager and its General Manager raised their voices to reemphasize the diversity, novelty and freshness of short subjects (see Eschmann; Gibbons; Pearson). I thank Ilka Brasch for drawing my attention to this particular material.

1922), with regard to the amount of diegetic action that is compressed into each installment.[57] In its promotion of both serials, Pathe drew attention to this technique of speed-up by arranging various illustrations of the thrills included in one installment within their ads. In a *Hurricane Hutch advertisement* that appeared in the September 21, 1921 issue of *Exhibitor's Trade Review*, for instance, five illustrations are included and three of these features a prominent technology of acceleration: an airplane, a motor boat, a train. Just as other American film companies, Pathe moreover used the self-validational strategy of adopting a rhetoric of temporal outperforming.[58] To renew the appeal of their serial for patrons and to elicit extrinsic validation, they for instance emphasized that they have yet again increased the *Takt* of stimulation in their newest installment of *The Exploits of Elaine*: "A new mark is set in thrills and intensity" (*Moving Picture World* 2 Jan. 1915). Evidently convinced of Pathe's newest success in this endeavor, the reviewer Margaret I. MacDonald reveled in the same journal that the "suspense is made even more breathless" in the newest installment of *Exploits*; a week later, she again announced that *Exploits* proceeds in "a breakneck speed into one of the best of its kind in the matter of serials" ("Second Installment" 388; "Third Episode" 498).

In the emergent domain of American film, self- and time-conscious actors raced for recognition. To be successful on the American market, the aspiring foreign company Pathe realized, they had to prove their dedication to the collective project of finding new speed techniques and they needed to evince a sufficient degree of nationalism (for instance by producing westerns). Through the sum of discursive acts of self- and extrinsic validation as well as extrinsic regulation, acceleration was established as the new norm while Americanness, efficiency and speed-up were rhetorically intertwined: Being American began to signify wanting to go faster; the capacity to act efficiently and to devise new techniques of acceleration came to distinguish successful American actors. The selection of source material examined in this chapter has illustrated that many actors in the domain did not find it difficult to adapt their practice and 'products' to the new norm – if only they could come up with a new technique to speed up the experiential *Takt* of their filmic products at a higher frequency and found a way of including the right buzzwords in their ads. An affirmative, even enthusiastic embrace of acceleration became the key to success. The case of Pathe demonstrates that a regulatory dynamic materialized within the discourse on American film at the same time that it evidences how even 'divergent' actors could (re)claim a prominent position in the field if only they adapted their practice and 'products' to the value of acceleration and promoted themselves accordingly.

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[57] The 'thrill-a-minute' soon became a standard speed in American film serials, as the term's inflationary use in advertisements from the century's first two decades demonstrates: See for instance the advertisement titled "William Fox Presents The Fourth Estate" (*Variety* 14 Jan. 1916), the advertisement for *Raiders* (*Motography* 19 May 1917), the advertisement entitled "Changes in Fox Releases" (*Motography* 1 July 1917) as well as the advertisements for *The Yellow Eel* (*Wid's Daily* 15 June 1919), *The Lone Hand* (*Universal Weekly* 6 Oct. 1922) and *Steelheart* (*Exhibitors Trade Review* 30 June 1923).

[58] In a 1916 issue of *Moving Picture World,* the production company Kalem declared in an advertisement that it had managed to further accelerate the *Takt* of thrilling stimulation in *The Hazards of Helen* by compressing "five reels of thrills [...] into the one reel length" (8 Jan. 1916). In 1920, Ascher's Enterprises produced a serial starring the lightweight boxer Benny Leonard and announced it as "THE FASTEST MOVING MELODRAMA EVER PRODUCED" because "[s]uch gripping scenes never followed each other in such rapid succession before in serial history" (*Motion Picture News* 10 Jan. 1920).Contemporary producers of slapstick comedies, too, used this rhetoric of temporal outperforming to promote themselves. Keystone advertisements, for instance, commonly employ this rhetoric: In *Film Daily* issues from the mid-1920s, for instance, a front-page advertisement promotes "the fastest moving story, with a thrill and a laugh a minute" (19 Sept. 1922). Another advertisement proclaims that the "audience will have to hurry to keep up with the laughs" (26 Nov. 1924) and only nine days later, an advertisement for a comedy series asserts that "[n]o similar series [was] [...] ever packed with as many laughs" (4 Dec. 1924).

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE THREAT OF SPEED?

The sources examined in this chapter have additionally revealed, however, that everyone's urge to signal their relative compliance had a problematic effect: While critical voices of the day were elsewhere drawing attention to the inherent dangers of miraculously accelerating technologies,[59] it became a common practice to remain relatively uncritical about the negative repercussions of machine speed in the domain of American film. It seems likely that one of the reasons was that an open critique would have endangered the respective company's reputation. According to Kirby, even films that depicted the threat of technological acceleration often "interiorized [it] in such a way as to ignore it," for instance by picturing "the disruptive force of the train and its aesthetic potential [as] [...] the revelation of a [...] revolutionary vision, both cinematically and ideologically" (8, 9). Even in a genre such as slapstick comedy, where the machine run wild is a common trope, this tendency can be discerned. Just as other genres and formats of early and transitional-era film, slapstick comedies were designed to entice audiences into the harmless joy and thrill of machine speed.[60] Accordingly, many reviewers of the day did not even address the portrayals of uncontrollable machines and their super-human power in slapstick comedies. Instead, they celebrated the positively thrilling pace at which gags/laughs succeeded one another within them.

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[59] For instance, contemporary critics appealed to common sense – and to railroad officers – to put safety before ever higher velocity in passenger travel (i.e., speed-adjustment according to levelling of the lines and the condition of the tracks, etc.). Most perceptively, these critics noted that not only the "mad hurry and gallop" of business America was to blame for this "dangerous rivalry" in the railroad business ("Speed and Safety" 1) but they equally attacked "the pressure of the public for quicker transit" because here originates the "eagerness to meet the public demand for speed" in the business ("Certainty, Safety, and Speed" 1; "Less Speed" 1; cf. "Railway High Speed Mania").

[60] The question whether leading slapstick producers such as Keystone aimed to formulate a critique in the first place certainly deserves more attention. Keystone's self- and time-conscious advances in technical acceleration with techniques such as "hyperediting," which decreased the Average Shot Length from 20 to 10 seconds (Gunning, "Systematizing" 19), as well as its ambitious self-promotion with the slogan "always new, always novel" ("Triangle" 1901), however, point to the contrary. Rob King and Tom Gunning, too, claim that the mechanism of the slapstick gag as such relies on the presupposition that technologies (of acceleration) are usually controlled by human intellect so that a "sudden collapse of a built-up expectation" turns the machine out of control into a "spectacle[] of harmless destruction" that never threatens to inflict any serious damage (Gunning, "Mechanisms" 139, 142). In slapstick comedies, the machine-run-wild, they argue, was accordingly featured as a "carnivalesque," hence a momentary, harmless and abnormal state rather than a dystopian probability. It was commonly portrayed as the outcome of an individual's inability to adequately handle a machine (King 191, cf. 169; cf. Bowser 108). Jeffrey Schnapp similarly asserts that the accident in slapstick comedy becomes "the locus of a form of trauma that, contrary to prevailing traumatocentric accounts of modernity, [...] thrills" (4).

The film critic Wid Gunning for instance enthusiastically calls Griffith and Mack Sennett, the founder of the slapstick company Keystone and former director of the comedy unit at Biograph, the "living 'tempo builders' in the business today" in his 1915 essay "Tempo – The Value of It." Gunning admires Sennett's ingenious technique of arranging thrills and laughs for the purpose of generating an experience of speed for the audience:

> Possibly you have noticed that in almost every Keystone comedy, the action goes along smoothly with a few good laughs for about half the length of the film and then suddenly it begins to swing faster and faster, until it is moving at the rate of about a mile a minute with laugh following laugh, just the proper time being allowed each to carry from one to the other. That's tempo. (qtd. in Riblet 179)[61]

The tendency to disregard potentially critical elements in fast-paced pictures within the critical discourse as well as the idea that hyper-accelerated media formats facilitate an immersion in speed rather than a critical engagement with it are crucial because the emergence of an alternate practice of American prose writing can be understood as a reaction to them. They inspired writers such as Asch, Borden and Frank to search for an alternative to thoroughly hyper-accelerated aesthetic arrangements – for an alternate kind of prose through which a critique could be transmitted that even critics such as Wid Gunning could not overlook. In 1925, Frank even directly attacked the 'Comedy of Commerce' for "cover[ing] it [the industrial tragedy] up with a surface, obfuscating and comedic," for adopting its "very rhythms." By doing so these films undercut their own critical potential and they "deny" the negative dimensions of American modernity as a whole ("Comedy" 117, 118, 118).[62]

In view of the counter-discursive stance that not only Frank, but also Asch and Borden, took at the time, it is important that hyper-accelerated media formats potentially facilitated an uncritical reception and that critics aiming to validate them tended to focus on the positive rather than the negative effects of machine speed: thrill instead of threat. In response to such tendencies, the three authors examined in the second part of this study independently opted for an approach to modern American prose writing in the 1920s that would enable them to transmit a critical diagnosis, to sensitize American readers to the downside of speed-up and to animate them to challenge the imperative of acceleration.

My scrutiny of contemporary material has revealed that early filmmakers and exhibitors implemented various forms of acceleration (i.e., technological acceleration, tightly sequenced nickelodeon schedules, a high number of thrills or laughs per minute, etc.) to elicit acclaim in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, where an overarching discourse of acceleration was just emerging. The investigation of historical source material has revealed that such an endeavor was publicly acknowledged at this particular historical moment, when American pioneering had been reconfigured as a commitment to the conquering of new temporal frontiers through constant (technological) innovation. Moreover, it has demonstrated that a discourse of acceleration emerged within the field of early American film, within which forms of micro-power emerged as speed-up was established as a norm and imperative.

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[61] The phrase 'laugh-a-minute was originally used to advertise vaudeville acts, for instance in *Variety*'s section "New Acts of the Week" (see the Feb. 23, 1907, Apr. 24, 1909 and Sept. 4, 1909 issues). In the online archive *lantern.mediahist.org*, the term first occurs as a description for motion pictures in the advertisements for Kalem comedies (*Motography* 24 Oct. 1914). The label came to general use in advertisements (see *The Film Daily* 1 Oct. 1937; 21 Sept. 1930; 8 Jan. 1942).

[62] Compare Van Wyck Brooks' critique of the "doctrine" that "the function of art is to turn aside the problems of life from the current of emotional experience and create in its audience a condition of cheerfulness" ("Splinter" 277).

Within the overarching discourse of acceleration, all of these developments were indeed instrumental in establishing the new medium: In a survey from 1912, American "readers and a select group of top scholars" placed cinematography beside the steam engine, the automobile and the airplane because it, they claimed, equally propels the "'conquest of modernity' and rapid technological progress" (Albera 122). In *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), the first study to recognize the medium as an art form, the poet and cultural critic Vachel Lindsay similarly used a temporal parameter to distinguish American film from other 'national' variants: In the study, Lindsay claims that one can tell American motion pictures apart from British pictures because they depart from the plodding, inhibited deduction of the literally timeworn "Sherlock-Holmes plot" in order to cater to a modern "audience [of] mechanical Americans." Lindsay identifies the action photoplay as the finest and most popular of American genres because the terse sequences of "spectacles [arranged within it] gratify the incipient or rampant speed-mania in every American:" the action goes "faster, faster, faster, and faster" and the "rhythmic quality of the picture-motions is twitched to death" (11, 10, 13, 9, 8). As the 1912 survey and Lindsay's comments illustrate, American filmmakers' constant advances in technical acceleration as well as their programmatic self-validation instituted the new medium as a modern American success. Already in the teens, fast, thrilling films were celebrated as unmistakably American and perfectly suited to satisfy thrill-craving national audiences, however diverse they may have been. They were celebrated as remarkable 'products' of technical acceleration and of accelerated technical progress.

The next chapter turns to the domains of city planning and modern business in order to show that self- and time-conscious actors in these domains adopted the rhetoric of speed-up to validate themselves and their products in modern America, too. This chapter will elucidate why Lindsay was inspired to write that "[t]hese [American moving picture] shows work like the express elevators in the Metropolitan Tower" (11). It will furthermore expand the discursive context, which provides the basis for the investigation in part two – for instance for Borden's 1927 conception of Peter Campbell, *Flamingo*'s protagonist, as an architect who dreams of "clear angles, geometric masses, walls that stream up, stream down" but who is plagued at night by the “pictures [that] [...] succeeded each other with breathless rapidity” on his “closed eyelids[, which] became a kind of movie screen” (Borden, *Flamingo* 249, 197).

II.B SCIENTIFICALLY ENGINEERING THE AMERICAN METROPOLIS: CITY PLANNING, HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS, OFFICES AND THE DISCOURSE OF ACCELERATION

> Greater Efficiency is the demand of the age, in manufacturing, in selling, in office management, in everything.
>
> "For Greater Efficiency in Typewriting," *Washington Post* 27 May 1914 (4)

On May 27, 1914, this statement appeared in the *Washington Post*, describing to readers the need to reduce the waste of time, energy and material in all domains of American life. In the second sense of the term 'demand,' it furthermore identified efficiency and speed-up as universal imperatives of modern life, impelling readers to mind this imperative whether they were engaged in the domain of manufacturing, selling, office work or anywhere else. Opening this chapter, the *Washington Post* statement stands in for countless discursive acts of the day that illustrate just as well how the new imperative of the age proliferated within an overarching discourse of acceleration in America. It is most telling that only three years later, the famed pioneer of efficiency-engineering in the domain of manufacturing, Henry Ford, had his Motion Picture Department produce and distribute a series of films. Much like Edison and Biograph in their actualities about the skyscraper attraction (cf. Jacobs 167, fn. 23), Ford chose the "grandeur and impressive modernity of American cities" as the subject of his films: *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* (1917), *Washington, D.C.* (1918) and *New York City* (1919) (Grieveson 41). Since the early decades of the nineteenth century, the urban centers of the United States had been transformed by a dramatic increase in population (797 per cent alone between 1820 and 1860), revolutions in transportation technology (steam and electricity), an intensification of commercial activity as well as the advent of a vibrant entertainment culture (cf. Steen 25, 31, 35, 43, 63). These developments left urban centers highly heterogeneous in cultural and ethnic terms as well as ill-structured with regard to street layout and transportation at the end of the century. Efforts of making American cities more efficient since the 1880s – of working speed into their infrastructural texture (their streets, their public transport, their architecture, their offices) – apparently inspired Ford to celebrate urban landscapes of this 'fast' sort in the medium of film, which had been established as a fast American medium itself, as the previous chapter demonstrates.

This chapter turns to the nascent profession of city planning to demonstrate that ambitious, self-appointed actors in this domain based the project of consolidating their practice and establishing its *raison d'être* in America on the new value of speed-up as well. Just as those engaged with early film, they did so during the first wave of acceleration, when American pioneering had been reconfigured as a temporal endeavor. Joining the late nineteenth-century reform spirit with the new value of acceleration and using quasi-scientific techniques, self-appointed city planners set out to reorganize old and allegedly slow urban structures. They forcefully distanced themselves from previous movements and declared that speed should be the modern American planner's primary aim. By declaring publicly and repeatedly that they are basing their objectives and practice on the value of speed-up in order to gain legitimacy within the overarching discourse of acceleration, they set a dynamic of acceleration into motion on the level of discourse in their own domain. In ensuing smaller steps, this chapter will shift its attention to a number of other urban actors and phenomena of the day (the high-rise building, American businesses and offices) that *City Block*, *Flamingo* and *The Office* address in their renegotiation of acceleration. In these domains, similar processes took place, as the following scrutiny of historical sources will reveal.

II.B.1 CRITIQUE AND REMEDY: CITY PLANNING IN MODERN AMERICA

In 1917, two spokespersons of the city planning movement, George B. Ford and Ralph B. Warner, decided to open the volume *The City Planning Progress in the United States* with the following declaration: "City Planning is the name given to a science and art which has existed since the beginning of civilization, but which has recently been given new direction and a much more vital and comprehensive purpose" ("Introduction" 1). During the first wave of acceleration, city planning was established as a new profession that shared its chief objective – increasing speed and efficiency in a scientific manner – with many other practices of the day, not least moving picture production. The profession of city planning grew out of the *fin de siècle* reform spirit of the Progressive Era, more specifically the 'City Beautiful' movement, which was active around the turn of the century. Even though city planners' aims were, to an extent, compatible with the City Beautiful's objective of "uniting good circulation and 'urban hygiene' with beauty," the self- and time-conscious representatives of the conspicuously forward-directed "City Practical" movement distanced themselves from their predecessors from the outset – they seemed utterly engaged with the past, for instance in their embrace of neoclassicism (Ford/Warner 1; Scott 68, cf. 1, 43, 48-50). Proponents of the City Practical even held the City Beautiful partly responsible for the "evils" that existed in American cities: The latter had allegedly failed to realize its plans and was unconcerned with street and transportation systems, they claimed (Nolen, *New Ideals* 5; cf. Scott 79, 83).[63] Since 1909, the year in which the journal *The American City* was launched and the first National Conference on City Planning was held, self-proclaimed city planners adopted a rhetoric of innovation, speed-up and scientificity in order to distance themselves from such an allegedly anti-modern and un-American approach. Doing so, they demonstrated their determination to consolidate city planning as a modern American practice that was allegedly geared more directly towards the national endeavor of acceleration in the new century. John Nolen, once a landscape architect associated with the City Beautiful movement himself,[64] accordingly closes his 1909 article "City Making" in the first issue of *The American City* with the following mission statement:

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[63] Parenthetically, it must be noted that the opposition created by the proponents of the City Practical movement was in fact not as absolute. Mel Scott points out that "the civic endeavors marking the beginnings of city planning were [...] not devoid of broad social motivation and, frequently, a concern for municipal efficiency and economy" even though they were "mainly aesthetic rather than analytic or 'scientific'" (43). For a history of the City Practical movement and its predecessors (housing reform movement; municipal art movement), see Scott's study *American City Planning since 1890*.

> Intelligent city planning is one of the means toward a better utilization of our resources, toward an application of the methods of private business to public affairs, toward efficiency, toward a higher individual and higher collective life. [...] If we want to avoid waste of money and time, we must find ways to avail ourselves more fully of the incalculable advantages of skillful city planning. (19)

In many respects, the statement illustrates Nolen's careful adjustment of his rhetoric to the imperatives that were just emerging within the overarching discourse of acceleration, for instance in the field of early film. Not only does Nolen include the catchphrase 'we want to avoid waste of money and time,' thereby signaling his mindfulness about the imperative of (time-)efficiency. He moreover presents city planning as a quasi-scientific, specifically American practice ('intelligent,' 'skillful') that proceeds strategically and efficiently ('methods of private business') to save the American public time and money.[65] With such powerful formulations, which call up both the Progressive-Era reform spirit and the emerging discourse of acceleration, the aspiring city planner Nolen set out to establish his profession in America. At the same time, the phrase 'we must find ways' illustrates that Nolen wanted his statement to function as a directive as well: It was supposed to generate a form of discursive micro-power that would impel other actors in the field to carry out a search for better ways of applying 'skillful city planning,' too. In this day and age, Nolen stresses in his programmatic article, it is imperative that the modern planner performs a modern version of American pioneering.

Straight Streets, Rapid Transit, Scientific Methods

As in the domain of early film, a dynamic of acceleration emerged on the level of discourse within the field once aspiring actors began to adopt a rhetoric of speed-up to promote their profession as a distinctly modern and American one. Laying the groundwork for their own triumph as American speed-pioneers, they formulated a critique of American cities' status quo and based it, quite conspicuously, on distinctly modern, American values: In lectures and in book-length publications, city planners adopted a rhetoric of acceleration, declaring in unison that there was an urgent need for re-planning since urban America existed in an impossibly decelerated state due to the "haphazard and aimless" urban growth of the past decades (Haldeman, "Thoroughfares" 281; cf. Maltbie 109). Although technologies of (transport) acceleration were already in use, the circulation of goods and people throughout urban America was inadequately slow due to a lack of organization, they claimed. To tackle these problems, city planners devoted their first two National Conferences to the "waste" of time, energy and money caused by (population or traffic) congestion, one of the "evils following in the wake of the tremendous activity," as well as to the inefficiencies of privately-owned transportation facilities, whose "inertia in itself," they claimed in unison, would be "difficult to overcome" without careful planning (Olmsted, Introduction 9; Haldeman, "Control" 178; Wadsworth 273, 273).[66] Still in 1919, Nolen criticized that "streets now carry vehicles of at least three distinct speeds" whereas "efficiency requires separate lines and tracks for the use of each" (*New Ideals* 49; cf. Ford, "City Scientific" 34). Three years later, Benjamin A. Haldeman put his finger on a related problem: "[I]n the absence of wide, direct highways, routes wind with many turns through streets so narrow that every crossing must be approached with caution, crossing stops are close together, slow-moving vehicles obstruct the tracks, and time is lost in rounding many curves" ("Thoroughfares" 287-77). As these exemplary statements reveal, American city planners were enhancing their profile during the early years by drawing on the modern American value of speed to formulate their critique of the status quo. In this manner, they established speed(-up) as a norm and imperative within their own field from early on, impelling other actors in the field to act accordingly.

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[64] Frederick Law Olmsted, who became another prominent representative of the City Practical movement, had been a leading landscape architect who was Park Superintendent for the construction of Central Park in 1857 as well as for Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 (cf. Steen 50, 88).

[65] For similar examples, see Eliot, Ford, "City Scientific" and Goodwin.

At the same time, these statements signaled to actors beyond their small circle that these planners' support for the collective cause of time-economy was absolutely essential. In outlining their objectives, city planners stylized themselves as new advocates of acceleration. With self-awareness and self-confidence, they repeated the often-heard truism that "modern speeding-up processes [...] seem to be essential to American progress and must be provided for" (Haldeman, "Thoroughfares" 294). In their talks and texts, city planners thus promoted their profession-in-the-making as a practice that would restore the accelerative potential of 'old' structures and would institute new technical means to further speed up urban circulatory systems. After they had in a seemingly *pro-forma* fashion adopted the method of zoning[67] to improve housing conditions and to cater to urban dwellers' "necessities," such as "fresh air and sunshine and the opportunity for exercise," the subjects of rapid transit and street optimization became their central concern (Nolen, "City Making" 18; cf. Wright 125).[68] The historian John D. Fairfield presents a similar observation in his article "The Scientific Management of Urban Space." He writes that the city planning movement became "increasingly hesitant to tackle the social problems that had first given rise to the demand for planning" in the nineteenth century (190). According to Fairfield, Olmsted and Nolen began to think about the city as a "complex of interrelated systems, the arteries of circulation articulated with the larger parks and outlying reservations, the small playgrounds planned as adjuncts of the schools, the neighborhood parks and larger playgrounds distributed throughout the city as systematically as the schools" around 1906 (72). At the National Conference, however, the total number of papers exclusively concerned with civic centers, housing and recreational facilities dropped from seven between 1910 and 1914 to merely three during the decade following 1914. Meanwhile, papers on various forms of accelerated public transportation and street optimization abounded: Twenty-three contributions addressed these techniques of acceleration between 1910 and 1914, twenty within the following five years and another thirty-three between 1920 and 1924 alone. A domain-specific discourse of acceleration was emerging in the field, as these numbers indicate. The reason for planner's alignment was certainly not that social problems or the need for recreational facilities suddenly disappeared. It rather seems that they orientated themselves towards the new, apparently more pressing – and more promising – challenge of bringing the American city up to maximum speed. This was, after all, a commitment that would most likely bestow substantial public honor upon them. In keeping with this notion, the planner Nelson Lewis declared that housing and public health are in fact "matters of administration rather than [city] planning" (qtd. in Fairfield 190) and Nolen repeatedly clarified that zoning primarily aims to increase economic "profit," not to improve living conditions ("Subdivision" 35; cf. "City Making" 15). In his influential volume *New Ideals in the Planning of Cities, Towns, and Villages* (1919), Nolen even lists as the first 'general principle' of city planning the "economy and the saving of waste in an endeavor to secure the desired results at a minimum of expense" and declares just as programmatically: "City planning, let it be understood, is not a movement to make cities beautiful in a superficial sense. Its purposes are fundamental. [...] [I]t seeks to save waste, the almost incalculable waste due to unskilful and planless [sic!] procedure" (25, 7). With powerful statements such as this one, which are informed by a clear economic rationale, an ambitious city planner such as Nolen sought to establish his profession as another distinct, essential ('profound') form of American speed-pioneering. His resolute tone reveals that extrinsic regulation was on his agenda as well: He was determined to align his fellow planners in ideological and practical terms ('let it be understood'). Already in his contribution to the first issue of *The American City*, he insists that the city plan must be "improved and again improved by replanning and remodeling to fit changed conditions and new ideals:" A city planner must constantly "replan and replan, [...] readjust and readjust" ("City Making" 16). As Nolen perceptively notes in his 1919 volume, regulative acts such as these were essential to consolidate the movement as an American profession during the early years, to direct it towards the 'right' goals: They provided "an effective means of stimulating and directing the movement" (29).

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[66] For similar pronouncements of objective, see Ford, "Regional" 3; Lane, F. Van Z./Nolen; Maltbie 117; Olmsted, "Introductory;" D. L. Turner.

[67] Zoning is the allocation of different uses to different sections of land. The method was first introduced in Germany. It entails the standardization of streets, blocks, lots and houses. Graded districts are allocated to accommodate residential zones and level stretches are put to industrial, infrastructural or economic use (cf. Haldeman, "Control" 180–181).

[68] While street planning as well as freight and passenger transportation had been discussed since the early days of the National Conference, rapid transit facilities first became the sole issue of contributions in 1914 and more frequently since 1920.

As other planners' statements on accelerated public transportation and traffic circulation reveal, an alignment of this sort emerged in the field. A dynamic of acceleration materialized within the domain-specific discourse as also other city planners began to emphasize with ever greater self-confidence that their primary collective purpose should be acceleration: Commuting from beyond the central business area, Milo Maltbie pronounces in his 1913 paper "Transportation and City Planning," "is not a question of distance as a question of time" (108).[69] In the paper he presented at the 1914 National Conference, John Vipond Davies similarly compares different possibilities of accommodating rapid transit facilities in American cities and discusses the conditions under which the steam railroad, the street surface railroad as well as the subway and elevated railroads would be able to reach their maximum speed of thirty to thirty-five miles per hour ("Provision" 196–204). On many occasions, city planners declared that they were optimizing the width, gradient and sinuosity of streets and tracks with regard to their respective location, function and vehicular use in order to technically speed up the circulation of people, goods and vehicles through the city.[70] They identify "thoroughly efficient and satisfactory service" and, most notably, "the most direct and speedy routes" in public transport as their main objectives: "[c]ity planning means first of all adequate facilities for circulation" (Nolen, *New Ideals* 55, 55, 47; cf. Ford, "Regional" 11). As these exemplary comments reveal, it would be insufficient to attribute the advent of acceleration as a main objective of city planning to internal or structural forces (secular Protestantism; the fear of falling behind; the acceleration circle), as Rosa's theorizations suggest (see chapter I). As planners began to evaluate their own and others' practices on the basis of the new American value of acceleration, an driving force of speed-up emerged in this field on the level of discourse, impelling everyone to pursue a modern kind of pioneering.

The rhetoric that came to dominate the debates among city planners strongly resembles the one taken up by individuals in the film business: Pathe's General Sales Manager, for instance, declared in 1922 that "our progress will be most rapid and positive" if only "we select the straight line as being the shortest distance between two points" (Eschmann 77). As this terminological correspondence to Nolen's call for 'the most direct and speedy routes' demonstrates, both city planners and motion picture producers adopted a rhetoric of acceleration to establish their practice in modern America. Such a clear correspondence in rhetoric and strategy evidences that more than

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[69] With this statement, Maltbie sided with a *New York Times* reader, who had stated in a letter to the editor in 1859 that "this matter [of an increasing distance between residence and work] has resolved itself into a matter of *time* rather than of distance" (A. 2).

[70] See, for instance, the contributions by Davies, "Effect;" Haldeman, "Thoroughfares;" Nolen, *New Ideals*; Schaeffer.

‘a close relation’ existed between both practices. The domain-specific discourses of acceleration, which emerged in both fields at roughly the same time, were essentially part of an overarching discourse of acceleration.

Within this overarching discourse, city planners sought to elicit financial and institutional support by presenting themselves as experts who use a scientific approach to speed up the circulation of people and goods in American cities.[71] Since the early days of the annual conference, city planners claimed that they had been profoundly inspired by “true engineering lines” of action while they de-emphasized their roots in (landscape) architecture (Davies, “Provision” 211; cf. Olmsted, Introduction 3). George B. Ford’s paper “The City Scientific,” delivered at the fifth National Conference in 1913, is a most remarkable source in this respect. In the paper, Ford promotes city planning as an exact science, claiming that the “method” for acquiring the knowledge and applying it to greater urban efficiency “can actually be standardized [...] into that highly respectable thing called an exact science” (31). A year earlier, Ford had already presented this notion in front at the Academy of Political Science in New York City (cf. “City-Planning” 180–84). With an open letter to the *New York Times* in late 1913, he once again sought to trigger public acclaim by delineating the commendable quasi-scientific approach that a permanent City Planning Commission in New York City could take: It would “diagnose” the “physical ills of a community,” identify and classify areas in need of re-planning and, finally, work out a “comprehensive plan” (“Dignified” C6). In the preface to *The City Planning Progress in the United States: 1917*, Ford, together with Warner, once again stressed that the Town Planning Committee of the American Institute of Architects, who compiled the volume, lays “particular stress on the economic and engineering side of city planning” (iii). Ford’s strategy to promote his profession’s scientific approach to technical acceleration repeatedly and in front of different audiences reveals that he was operating not only within the discourse in his own domain but also within a larger, overarching discourse of acceleration to solicit financial and institutional support. He made known time and again to different addressees that “city planning is rapidly becoming as definite a science as pure engineering” (“City Scientific” 31).

VALIDATING CITY PLANNING AS A MODERN AMERICAN PROFESSION WITHIN THE OVERARCHING DISCOURSE OF ACCELERATION

Despite all of these efforts, city planners occasionally became the target of regulatory assaults within the overarching discourse of acceleration. At the 1921 National Conference, the Resident Vice President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Elliot H. Goodwin for instance openly critiqued city planners for allowing that “there has been a large waste of money” in their field of engagement. Goodwin urged them to mind the imperatives of the day more attentively: The American city "needs the application of efficiency engineering [...] precisely as the overgrown factory" so it is "wise to look upon an industrial city from the point of view of its being a workshop or a factory" (193, 190). As this regulative intervention by a business representative demonstrates, a dynamic of validation and regulation emerged not only within one individual domain, but in-between related fields as well – an insight that is essential to the following re-reading of American modernism's emergence as a practice and discursive construct within the modern media landscape. To both avert such regulative assaults and to invite validation, planners thus frequently detailed the "real science" of gathering a "very extensive archive" of "accurate data," which allowed them to "proceed[] logically" from "investigation, analysis" and "deduction" towards "a definite figure" (Magee 73; Lane, F. Van Z./Nolen 8; Olmsted, "City" 3; Ford, "City Scientific" 31, cf. 34–36).[72] When they were campaigning for the appointment of urban city planning commissions or offices since 1913, planners proposed that such an institution would be "a hopefully rising spiral" whose capacity to "adopt and keep pace with these changes" within the city constitute its "value" (Olmsted, "City" 10, 7). In the paper "A City Planning Program," which was presented at the 1913 conference, Olmsted stylizes the ideal office as a "flywheel" in which an engineer or an "unusually persistent and effective group of citizens" generates a "spasmodic creative energy and imaginative power" (19).[73] Such metaphoric descriptions appear designed to convince potential supporters that city planners were, in fact, contributing to American speed-pioneering as much as Henry Ford, who wrote in 1928: "my advice is [...] to revise any system, scrap any methods, abandon any theory if the success of the job requires it" (*Philosophy* 84).

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[71] A number of studies chronicle the rise of city planning by addressing the field’s aspirations in applied science or by drawing analogies to principles of scientific management as well as progressive reform movements (see Fairfield; Scott, *American*).

As the years drew on, city planners extended their self-promotional activities ever more widely beyond their own circle. They published anthologies such as *City Planning Progress in The United States: 1917* or monographs such as *New Ideals in the Planning of Cities, Towns, and Villages* (1919) to increase the public visibility of the City Practical movement. Charles H. Wacker, chairman of the Chicago Plan Commission, and public relations official Walter D. Moody cooperated in propagandizing the principles of city planning amongst eighth-graders, who used *Wacker's Manual of the Plan of Chicago* as a school book since 1912. No less than fifty thousand copies were printed. Other city planners held slide lectures on city planning in school auditoriums and elsewhere, with approximately 175,000 people attending in seven years. Almost as many Americans (more than 150,000) saw the two-reel moving picture *A Tale of One City*, the first film to give an insight into the 'science' of city planning (cf. Scott 140). As all of these self-promotional acts demonstrate, city planners were eager to have their cause acclaimed within the overarching discourse of acceleration.

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[72] Ford described the scientific approach as a "logical deduction from a quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of all the contributory facts" ("Regional" 3). Other planners presented numbers or sketches to outline the status quo and future plans. For general descriptions of the method, see "Efficiency in City Planning" (140-41); Ford, "How Zoning Affects" (43–44); Ford/Warner (1); Goodrich (103); Haldeman, "Control" (197); Nolen, *New Ideals* (31-37, 11).

[73] In markedly similar terms, William A. Magee, mayor of Pittsburgh, stylized a planning commission as a force that regulates yet by no means obstructs: a "centripetal element in the sea of inert and diverging energies [...], the element spreading enlightenment among the ignorant and enthusiasm in the fight against passivity" (84). The engineer George F. Swain underlined at the fourth National Conference that "as in everything else, the only thing that is permanent is change. Our cities [...] are always in the making. The character of a district, and its transportation needs, very radically change in a comparatively few years" (33).

A glance at contemporary newspaper coverage illustrates that this effort was not in vain. Throughout the first two decades of the new century, general-interest newspapers took note of city planners' projects and ambitions. They frequently spread the good news that a city planner had publicly presented new ideas or had proposed a new plan to speed up traffic or transportation.[74] Since the early days of the annual conference, American newspapers reported on these gatherings in an affirmative manner. When the conference took place in Boston in 1912, for instance, the *Boston Daily Globe* and the *Chicago Tribune* covered the event. In the former paper, two long articles announced the conference. Both of these articles feature large portraits of leading "City Planning Experts" (including Olmsted and Haldeman) and they detail the planners' objectives as well as their quasi-scientific approach. The article that announced the three-day event on May 26 not only comments on the conference schedule at great length but it also prints Olmsted's statement that the conference will be concerned with "a single complex subject, namely, the intelligent control and guidance of the entire physical growth and alteration of cities" ("Three Days' Conference" 25). The article reviewing the event two days later, which features a summary of the most salient points made by speakers, for instance quotes Arnold W. Brunner's pledge to the cause of American progress: "'[T]he adaptation of a city plan is for the very purpose of encouraging commerce and facilitating the transaction of business.'" Modern American city planning, Brunner is quoted saying, "is an economy: it is not an artist's dream, it is a scientific reality" ("City Planning" 18). Besides citing such mission statements that give proof to planner's commendable aims and their *modus operandi*, the *Boston Daily Globe* further enriched their article's legitimatory impact by mentioning in both the text and in the headline that the planners went on an "afternoon auto trip" with 60 cars ("City Planning" 18). The fact that such excursions in an American icon of technological acceleration became a customary part of the National Conference and were generally mentioned in the news coverage reveals that city planners were right to focus their self-validational acts on the new American value of speed-up during the first wave of acceleration.[75]

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[74] See, for instance, "First Street Tunnel Urged;" "Tells Chicago to Copy London" or "Ways to Speed Up Traffic."

[75] See "Experts Picture the City of 1963" in the May 6, 1913 issue of *Chicago Tribune.*

II.B.2 SPEED-PIONEERING IN THE DOMAIN OF AMERICAN BUSINESS

In the paper he delivered at the 1921 National Conference of City Planning, Goodwin does not only put his finger on deficiencies that allegedly existed in the field but he also applauds planners' objectives, assuring them that his own trade supports these, too. As though echoing Henry Ford, he proclaims:

> The readiness of the American business man to scrap all his machinery when through invention it has become less efficient [...] is a constant source of wonder to the old world. He should, and will, I think, be found equally ready to back the enterprises necessary to increase the efficiency of the city as a workshop. (194)

This comment by a representative of American business illustrates that the discourses in both domains intersected as part of an overarching discourse of acceleration, within which advances in speed-up were applauded while conservatism and slowness were decried. Goodwin makes unmistakably clear that success-oriented businessmen in his own domain have long been eager to pioneer in a modern, American manner: Just as industrial innovators, they have tirelessly revolutionized their techniques ('machinery') for the purpose of increasing efficiency and speed, thereby helping to establish acceleration as a value. American business representatives, however, had something else in common with city planners: Even before the advent of the City Practical movement, various American businesses had recognized the potential of a 'fast' urban structure, the skyscraper, as a means to validate themselves within the overarching discourse of acceleration (cf. Fenske 25; Nye 89). In the skyscraper, which was brought into the world by revolutions in construction material as well as vertical transportation facilities (reinforced concrete, steel framing, the elevator), businessmen had seen a possibility to symbolically stage their speed-pioneering: These buildings "projected that linearity" which city planners valued in the straight, hence potentially fast street layout vertically "into the air," as David E. Nye points out (89, cf. 88). During the first wave of acceleration, businesses commissioned high-rise buildings to evidence their progress-mindedness, their readiness to apply new (building) materials and techniques for better results as well as their desire to speed up business operations in general.[76]

THE SKYSCRAPER AS AN EMBLEM OF AMERICAN SPEED-PIONEERING

In 1906, an article appeared in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that explores the motivations of the Union Bag and Paper Company and the Commercial National Bank to stage a "Race Between Skyscrapers" in the city of Chicago. The article's author observes that "[h]undreds of men at dizzying heights are urging the [respective] building upward [for each firm], while the brains of [the] great firms, pitted against each other in the contest of speed and workmanship, are devising new ways to hasten the work" (F3). While the author thus marvels at the spectacular 'race' performed by fast-working laborers and 'master-builders' eager to quicken the rate at which they replace construction techniques with faster ones, he, too, addresses the questions "[f]or what honors do these steel frames climb upward" and what "incentives drive the restless, changing machinery [of building] on and on without intermission." He answers them as follows:

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[76] Deceleration (i.e., congestion) was the unintended effect which these buildings produced. Quite paradoxically, the self-validational acts of some (businessmen building skyscrapers) became the prerequisite of other actors' self-validational acts (city planners who made it their aim to eradicate inertia in American cities).

> The honor of becoming the tallest skyscraper [...]. The boast of the consumption of an enormous amount of material. The introduction of the first plunger elevators in the city, an innovation in the office building here. The greatest speed record in the erection of buildings of such height. The use of one sheet prism glass, a unique feature and one known to no other building in the world. (F3)

For the author, it is clear that modern American enterprises are competing in the race of the skyscrapers to validate themselves within the overarching discourse of acceleration ('honor' and the ability to 'boast'). With their high-rise structures, he claims, they aim to exhibit various forms of novelty which would evidence that they use only the newest innovations in the fast-evolving field of modern architecture (maximum height, highest amount and quality of material, latest technological equipment, etc.), many of which constitute a form of technical acceleration (the speed of construction,[77] technological appliances).

A scrutiny of the newspaper coverage of skyscraper construction during the first wave of acceleration demonstrates that success-craving actors in the domain of American business were commonly racing for recognition with (scientifically) novel and speedy building projects. Moreover, it shows that they were rewarded for their efforts: Within the overarching discourse of acceleration, as it registered in general-interest newspapers, they were showered with praise.[78] In fact, individual newspapers had become chief proponents of speed as a new American value at least since 1847, when Richard March Hoe's rotary printing press revolutionized newspaper publishing. In the decades that followed, newspapers informed their readers whenever they had increased the speed of printing and/or distribution through technological acceleration, introducing them to revolutionary technologies (i.e., the telephone or the business phonograph), which made it possible to speed up news reporting.[79] They established speed-up as a new

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[77] The film scholar Steven Jacobs, too, observes in his article "Slapstick Skyscrapers" that "in the 1920s, the erection of a skyscraper was often regarded as an attraction in itself" due to its great speed (165).

[78] For the occasional critical article, see for instance Ernest Flagg's critical yet optimistic appeal "In Favor of the Skyscraper" which appeared in the *New York Times* on November 24, 1912. Still in 1932, the *Coronado Journal* critically stated that "[b]etween crowds and skyscrapers there is reciprocal affinity. [...] No other spot on earth is so crowded with men and houses. [...] So jammed is Fifth avenue now that in busy hours a man walking goes faster than a bus" ("Mighty Gotham" 3). Other sources of reservation were high-rise buildings' negative effects on light and ventilation (cf. "Regulates 'Skyscrapers';" "'Spite' Skyscrapers") as well as the "artificial tornadoes" that allegedly endangered women and old people as they swept through the cañons ("Skyscraper Perils"). For scholarly accounts of the ebbing down of critical voices, see Jacobs and Nye (97-99). For outstanding general praise for high-rise structures, see Howland; "Skyscraper Apartments;" "Tall Structure."

[79] On December 8, 1879, the *Washington Post* for instance let its readers know in a subscription advertisement that "[the] six-cylinder rotary press [...] will, we are assured, be in running order by 10th of December. We shall then have a capacity

American value in this manner as well as when they voiced their concern about slowness. An article that appeared in the *New York Times* in 1916 for instance addresses the problem that stock tickers are lagging 15 to 20 minutes behind in transmitting the rapid flow of sales quotations, the velocity of which had been increased by technical acceleration in communication technologies (i.e., the telegraph, the telephone). It furthermore recommends "eliminating ciphers in reporting sales" to increase the amount of information transmitted per unit of time ("Help" 12).[80] American newspapers became both central proponents of acceleration and multiplicators of the imperative of acceleration as they joined in the modern American speed-craze with great enthusiasm – they even participated in the race of the skyscrapers. By way of building high-rise structures that outranked those built by rivals in construction speed, height and technological equipment as their headquarters, they stylized themselves as pioneers in the age of acceleration.[81]

As general opinion makers, American newspapers reported on the spectacular races between construction projects and they celebrated specific firms for having buildings erected that once again broke records of construction speed or height because they were using novel construction techniques. An article that appeared in the *Los Angeles Herald* in 1906 for instance announces that "New Yorkers are treated to a stupendous race in building construction" and it identifies the United States Express building as the prospective winner. The appeal of such a race, the article suggests, is that all five competing projects are "representing the latest advance in skyscraper construction," which makes possible the amazing speed at which the buildings goes up into the air ("Model Construction" 46). The article even singles out two techniques of acceleration that are used in the work on the United States Express building: The laborers are reducing the length of pauses in-between tasks and they are completing multiple tasks at once,

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of ten thousand copies an hour" and they inform them that their "publication office is now connected with New York by direct wire, and efficient news gatherers [are] selected to send us the very latest intelligence." In 1893, Harry Chandler, writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, celebrated the record speed of the *Times*' Columbia Press (2000 eight-page papers in five minutes), the efficient bundling of the papers for mail delivery "in the least possible time" and the "efficient carrier system" used to distribute the paper at a high speed (10). See also "Newspaper Express;" "Reporters;" "The Electric Plant;" "The Telephone: A New Method."

[80] For a similar example, see the article "Boys Instead of Tickers" in the June 2, 1889 issue of the *New York Times*.

[81] When the *New York Tribune* completed their New York skyscraper in 1875 (at that time the tallest structure in the city), the *Observer*, the *Herald* and the *World* "almost immediately built tall office buildings of their own" on the same street (Park Row) (Nye 89). For an especially striking case of self-validation, see the 'self-coverage' of the construction of the *New York Times*' new office building, which opened on New Year's Day in 1905. Months ahead of completion (4 Sept. 1904), an advertisement in the *Times* claimed that the unfinished structure gives the spectator an exhilarating sensorial experience of movement: "Its position at the head of the street gives the eye a grand sweep." Shortly before the structure was finished, the paper published a number of articles and advertisements to announce a 48-page long illustrated supplement titled "The Story of the Most Remarkable Modern Skyscraper Ever Erected." On December 30, 1904, the paper tried to entice potential readers with a front-page announcement about the special supplement, which identifies the building's distinguishing features and the quotidian work processes within it as scientifically managed: "No more complete plant exists in the world than the new workshop of THE NEW YORK TIMES." "The Times Building is the city's tallest structure [...] and it contains a larger percentage of steel to cubical elements to any other office building. It is the strongest and stiffest steel frame structure of similar dimensions ever erected, and its floor space is twenty-one times the area of the building lot. [...] [T]he greatest girder ever used in an office building was put in[to the Times building]" and the 74 miles of wire and 21 miles of conduit" here integrated are no less a "revelation" than the "new record" made "in [the] steel tonnage" used for the construction ("The Times in Its New Home" 1).

thus speeding up their work's pace: "No sooner are the foundations laid than the steel skeleton is begun, and, right behind the steel workers come" and if possible, work on different aspects (steel work and masonry) proceeds simultaneously" ("Model Construction" 46).

Just as in reviews of American film serials, a rhetoric of temporal outperforming was often employed for the purpose of extrinsic validation. For newspapers to publicly praise a firm for building a new skyscraper, the condition was that the building either represented a new record in the speed of construction, in its height and in the amount of material used or an innovation in the technological appliances used and in the building material.[82] In 1902, the *New York Times* for instance announced that the fifteen-story office building on 68 Williams Street, erected by the Thompson-Starrat Building Company, "marks a record for speed in the construction of tall buildings" because it was finished after only six months ("Quick Work on Buildings" 7).[83] In bold, capital letters, a *Los Angeles Herald* headline announced four years later that "Builders Break Records" since their new "steel and hollow tile type of construction" reduces the construction time of the New York Evening Post's twelve-story building to three months only (4). In late 1914, the *Los Angeles Times* even went so far as to applaud the Citizens' National Bank for ensuring that "[c]onstructing records are broken" on the building site for their new headquarters by threatening contractors with penalties for any delay ("Erected in Record Time" V1).[84]

As in the press coverage of very early film (projection), articles on American skyscrapers often listed the innovations in the construction process (thus indicating the speed of change in the field) and accentuated new achievements in technological acceleration, for instance the speed of elevator service. In 1893, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* announced that the Carnegie Steel Company's Pittsburgh building will host a pumping- and an electric light plant as well as elevators that run at the speed of 300 feet per minute ("Pittsburgh" 31). In 1902, the *Boston Daily Globe* declared that the elevators in New York's Flatiron Building will run "at a higher speed than those of any other building in America" ("New York's Wonderful Building" 44) and only one year later, the *New York Times* announced that "the greatest care has been exercised by the architects and skilled experts [...] to ensure for this model and noteworthy building [the paper's own office] the best [elevator] service that can be secured in the present state of the art." Their electric elevators will run at a speed of 500 feet per minute and they will be equipped with a "unique system of electronic signaling devices" (two buttons for passengers to indicate whether they wish to go upwards or downwards) to increase the "rapid communication between the different departments" ("Installing" 24). Innovation (i.e., an acceleration of knowledge formation) and technical speed-up were key to businesses' self-validational acts of having new, technologically equipped buildings speedily constructed at the time, as these press responses indicate. These parameters were used by news reporters as normative parameters, too, to assess the significance of such ventures. At times, commentators even employed the label 'novelty,' which was also used extensively in reviews of early film (see chapter II.A.2), to distinguish a skyscraper's appeal to the American public.[85] The rhetoric of acceleration and innovation, which became common in press responses at the time, demonstrates that speed up – in its three distinct forms – had become a value that was taken up, circulated and reinforced in American newspapers.

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[82] On the accelerant potential of new materials such as steel, see the article "Millions in Skyscrapers," which asserts that "a concrete building rising by the slow and prosaic process of pouring semi-liquid concrete" has "none of the picturesqueness [...] that goes with the picturesqueness of a steel building" (VI3).

[83] See the *Los Angeles Times* article "Magic Wand in Building" for another example of a straightforward validation of the Thompson-Starrat Building Company. The notice focuses on the president's "inducement that his company can erect any kind of class A building [...] and have it completed to the last detail within a twelve-month" (IV11).

[84] Later that year, the newspaper also approvingly reported that "work is being rushed" on the building site of Haas, Baruch and Co., one of the prior mercantile concerns in town, who was building "one of the finest and most modern [structures] yet erected in the business district" with "one of the latest steel frame type" ("One of the Year's" V1).

THE WALL STREET, ITS *JOURNAL* AND THE DOMAIN-SPECIFIC DISCOURSE OF ACCELERATION

In the field of American business and economics, the domain-specific discourse of acceleration registered in such publications as the *Wall Street Journal*, which capitalized on existing trends of acceleration in the field, reinforced these in their news coverage and offered advertising space to ambitious actors. On the pages of this daily newspaper, the discourse that inspired Nathan Asch to quit his employment on Wall Street and to write *The Office*, a critique of hyper-accelerated life as a white-collar worker, can be retraced. The paper was established in 1889 by Charles Dow, Edward Jones and Charles Bergstresser, who had founded the financial information firm Dow Jones and Company seven years earlier. During the first wave of acceleration, a dynamic of speed-up materialized on the pages of this daily newspaper. Here, not only manufacturers found a space to advertise their newest products of technical acceleration but also the *Journal*'s staff published notices and articles in which they applauded speed-pioneers of American business. These acts signaled to everyone else in the field that acceleration was the *sine qua non* of success. After all, the *Wall Street Journal* was published by Dow Jones and Company, the time-conscious provider of stock market updates, who used the *Journal* to stage its own acts of self-validation: In a 1906 article, for instance, it praised itself for the "time and labor saving machinery" it had implemented in its office, enabling it to revolve at a "bewildering speed" to produce a "continuous newspaper." This paper was sent to subscribers through the news ticker and "five-minute editions" of printed news were distributed by news boys ("Wall Street's News Pulse" 6). More generally, the *Wall Street Journal* presented itself as an advocate of business efficiency, for instance when it approached an official of the Northern Pacific Railway Company in 1895, asking him to react to investors' "fear that the efficient operation of the road is impaired." In response to the *Journal*'s enquiry, the official guaranteed that "[t]rains are run over it [the rail bed] at the rate of 60 miles an hour and as smoothly as on the Pennsylvania" ("Northern Pacific" 4). In 1904, the *Wall Street Journal* even encouraged businesses to install electric fans in their offices to improve ventilation on hot summer days because this, it urged, would prevent deceleration, keeping the "office staff up to the normal pitch of accomplishment" ("Business Efficiency" 6).

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[85] See for instance the articles "New Down-Town Skyscraper" and "Skyscraper Novelties."

Fueling the dynamic of acceleration in the field, the *Wall Street Journal* awarded praise to those American businesses that had already succeeded in adapting the operative speed of their offices to the ever-increasing velocity of American business life (see "Efficiency of Office Forces" in the May 24, 1905 issue) or were just taking innovative measures to do so. Since its inception, for instance, the *Journal* regularly announced the speed records accomplished by railroad companies and their suppliers in and beyond a section entitled "Record of the Railroads:" "The locomotives used in the record breaking speed made yesterday on the lake Shore Railroad between Chicago and Buffalo were manufactured by the Brooks Locomotive Works, Dunkirk, New York" ("The Make of Engine" 4). This act of extrinsic validation – and countless others of its kind – propelled the collective race for recognition in the field.[86]

The same holds true for the numerous instances in which firms were acclaimed on the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* because they had employed skilled engineers to equip their offices' infrastructure for technical speed-up: In 1922, for instance, the engineers of the *New York Tribune*'s new high-rise building were applauded for planning to "make the structure a newspaper plant carrying out the Ford idea of efficient production" ("New York Tribune Building" 6). On other occasions, the *Journal* praised those who were training their employees in techniques of accelerating their pace of life (i.e., doing more in less time). With large headlines and detailed coverage, tribute was given to companies that, for instance, employed "efficiency experts [...] to modernize the company's plants and methods," as did the Chicago & Eastern Illinois Railroad in 1913, Eastern Railroads a year later and the American Hide & Leather Company in 1918 ("Am. Hide & Leather" 2; cf. "Chicago & Eastern Illinois;" "Efficiency Studies;" "Timely").[87] In 1913, the stock company Wells Fargo was praised as well because it had formed an "efficiency committee" to further "scientific efficiency" in order to "do away with what is termed 'lost motion' on the part of the[ir] express men." Even the company's president was cited reiterating the imperative of speed: "scientific efficiency, which is now so prominently before the public, [...] should have the effect of stimulating the thought and producing greater efficiency in men" ("Wells Fargo" 5). A year later, the *Wall Street Journal* similarly praises the innovative prowess of the largest American surety company, which had launched a competition among its employees to increase the rate at which they would improve the economic use of time in their office: Emphasizing that "[t]he efficiency of a corporation depends upon the efficiency of its employees," they promised the worker with the best idea a share of stocks ("Efficiency Plus Economy" 2). In such a persistent manner, this major news publication established acceleration as a norm and imperative for actors in the domain of American business and economics, continually sparking competition in the field.

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[86] See for instance "Making Fast Time;" "New Speed Record;" "Record of the Railways;" "Speed;" "Terrific Speed."

[87] For a critique of efficiency experts, see the story "Loom Dance" in Sherwood Anderson's *Perhaps Women.*

Praise was also given to businessmen who had proven their dedication to the national project of speed and efficiency. In 1890, the new president of the Chicago Telephone Company Henry B. Stone was honored in a short note for having acted as "a clean, efficient manager" already at his previous job with the Burlington and Quincy Railroad Company ("Henry B. Stone" 1; cf. "Deserved Recognition"). In 1910, the president of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) Frederick P. Fish received extrinsic validation in the *Wall Street Journal* because through his "'full speed ahead' temperament," he had managed to increase the number of business calls in New York to "an incredible Babel of 180,000 conversations an hour, with fifty new voices clamoring on the exchange every second" (Casson 6). An official of the Interborough Rapid Transit Company (the private operator of New York's early subway) received notice in the paper for ordering the replacement of still functional train engines that were no longer "marvels of power and speed," as they had been fifteen years ago. "'Everything must give way to increased speed,'" the official was quoted saying ("Demand for Speed" 2). In their sum, these exemplary press notices demonstrate that ambitious actors in the field were racing for recognition. They furthermore reveal that a domain-specific discourse of acceleration was emerging as also other actors (not least the journalists of the *Wall Street Journal*) were basing their value judgements on temporal parameters. In the *Wall Street Journal*, those who had forged ahead in the race for recognition by increasing the velocity at which they led their lives, conducted their business and implemented new techniques of acceleration, were extrinsically validated; speed-up was established as an imperative for everything and everyone. As a notice in announced in 1921, "'efficiency' has become a byword of American business [and] the efficiency expert has become a popular bug-a-boo" ("Efficiency" 2). The resultant dynamic of acceleration, which such discursive acts of validation furthered, was enhanced by the manufacturer-consumer marketing that found an outlet on the *Wall Street Journal*'s pages.

ADVERTISING FOR SPEED AND VALIDATION

Just as trade presses in the domain of early American film, the *Wall Street Journal* became a site where various ambitious actors in the field directly addressed their target audience and established themselves as American pioneers of technical acceleration to market their products.

"In overlooking The Wall Street Journal in the distribution of your advertising you are missing your best opportunity of reaching the [...] homes and offices of progressive and wealthy men," the paper itself reminded its readers in 1902 ("Questions of Economy" 3). To make their products appeal to these progressive men, many advertisers opted for the strategy of promising that their innovative appliances will once again increase the speed of work for its user. In advertisements that appear specially designed to entice American businessmen, the Monarch Typewriter Company for instance depicts (part of a) clock and explains that the new responsiveness of the 'Monarch light touch' not only facilitates speedier typing: Since the typist's physical energies are not exhausted immediately by the push of keys, she "is able to maintain full speed right up to closing time [as well] [...]. Her efficiency is increased, the output of her machine enlarged" (*Wall Street Journal* 16 Apr. 1909; 11 May 1909). Whereas the Monarch manufacturer thus capitalized on the greater productivity (i.e., doing more in less time), the Noiseless Typewriter Company soon asserted that the "radical improvement" of their own machine – its silent operation – would enable the typist to work even more rapidly: "The Noiseless is recognized today as the 'silent partner' of increased production. [...] [A]t every point, it means PROGRESS," the company professes in an advertisement that was placed in the April 19, 1922 issue of the *Wall Street Journal*. Directly addressing the potential buyer, the advertisement furthermore details the machine's assets of increased "Speed" and "Economy:" The "Noiseless is the *fastest* stock typewriter in the world" due to its "lightest touch." Moreover, it is "the most economical typewriter you can buy [...] because it can be operated constantly – even when you are talking over a long distance phone." To elicit extrinsic validation (i.e., sales), it seems, the advertiser underlines that the 'noiseless' quality of the machine will enable the typist to further accelerate her pace of life because she will be able to complete multiple fast operations (telephoning and speed-typing) at once.[88] Just as filmmakers claiming they had once again established a new thrill-a-minute record in a serial installment, typewriter companies evidently designed their advertisements according to a competitive logic – beating other machines' speed through innovations in technological speed-up. In this manner, the acts of self-validation staged by manufacturers established acceleration as a norm and imperative in the domain of American business. They produced a micro-power on the level of discourse, reminding readers that they would need to buy these new appliances to avoid lagging behind competitors in the field.

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[88] See the Remington Typewriter Company's ads as well, which tout the machines as the "new standard in time and labor saving" (*Wall Street Journal* 22 Oct. 1912). In the twenties, the company claimed that the new No. 12 model of their combined writing and billing machines has the time-saving qualities of other leading typewriters (the "natural touch – which makes the day's work swift and easy" as did the Monarch and the "degree of silence in operation" that distinguished the Noiseless) but that it has another "exclusive Remington feature, which saves nearly a[n additional] minute per letter in typing time:" the "*Self-Starter*, or automatic indenter" (*Wall Street Journal* 9 Nov. 1922).

The advertising strategy of targeting businessmen's fear of falling behind, which became common among advertisers in the *Wall Street Journal*, was especially conductive to this dynamic. For instance, American telephone companies adopted this strategy in their ads. Having considerably expanded long-distance telephone lines in the course of the 1910s, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company's regional subsidiary in New York quotes a businessman in the advertisement it placed in the *Wall Street Journal*'s May 30, 1912 issue, who has allegedly already expanded his private telephone exchange system and has thus "increase[d] efficiency" and accelerated the communicative processes within his firm: "'I KEEP my business constantly at my finger tips, [...] [f]rom my desk I have almost instant communication with all my branch offices.'" In 1922, the AT&T New York subsidiary again used the prospect of near instantaneity to promote long-distance telephony in the *Wall Street Journal* (9 Feb. 1922). Their advertisement promises prospective users that sending "your voice over the wires with virtually the speed of light" will save time and money. "Why not [...] get closer to your customers by telephone, cut your costs by telephone, speed up by telephone?" the company finally asks the *Journal*'s readers in order to activate their buying power.

In 1922, the Automatic Electric Company, supplier of switching equipment for the Bell system and independent companies, introduced its own mechanism to accelerate business communication in American offices: the Private Automatic Exchange system (P.A.X.). In the 1922 issues of *Wall Street Journal*, the company tried to snatch away the buying power of time-conscious businessmen from AT&T. They did so by targeting these men's fear of falling behind in the American business-race: In an advertisement that appeared in the January 6 issue, they for instance proclaim that "[m]ore than a thousand representative concerns who have installed the P.A.X. judiciously estimate that [they are] increasing the efficiency and productiveness of their workers at least five per cent." In the age of acceleration, such a pronouncement might have seemed like a threat to many in the field. At the least, it functioned as a directive, generating a form of micro-power that impelled readers to consider this appliance as an additional technological mechanism to accelerate work processes at their offices. All throughout 1922, Automatic Electric intensified the pressure on the time-worried readers of the *Wall Street Journal* by designing advertisements in which they portrayed and quoted successful businessmen who proclaim, like E.D. Conklin of the New York financial corporation McGraw-Hill Company, that the P.A.X. "is three times as fast as the manual system, saving 10 to 20 seconds per call. As it is used by fully 300 of our employes [sic!], this saving is really large" (4 Aug. 1922). As these examples illustrate, companies specializing in business communication targeted potential buyers' fears. This strategy demonstrates that even acts of self-validation (i.e., advertisements) put pressure on actors in the field to acquire new technological appliances that would speed up their businesses. Moreover, it once again illustrates the dynamic of acceleration, which emerged on the level of discourse in this domain as various ambitious actors began to base the acts through which they sought to validate themselves (i.e., provoke sales) and others on the new American value of speed-up. General notices that were published in the *Wall Street Journal* about the advent of new technologies of acceleration (i.e., the telephone) had a similar effect: they reiterated the new value of acceleration, radiating a discursive micro-power that pressured actors in the field to acquire and apply these technologies as well: the "large group of 'phone traders" who send messages "speed[ing] over Wall Street telephone wires," a notice in the August 30, 1912 issue for instance emphasizes, "have the market to themselves" ("What Do You" 2; cf. Casson).

Just as the Boston Efficiency Exposition, which was described as an "eye-opener to anyone who has never seen the inside of the modern business machine" in the *Boston Daily Globe* ("Remarkable Show" 4), the analytical glance cast in this chapter at historical sources from the domains of city planning and modern business as well as the press responses from general-interest newspapers has disclosed the overarching discourse of acceleration, which emerged as a driving force of speed-up during the first wave of acceleration in America. Discursive acts of self- and extrinsic validation as well as regulation sparked domain-specific discourses of acceleration that are part of an overarching discourse, within which 'compliant' actors gained fame as American pioneers of acceleration.

On October 27, 1920, an article titled "Merely Faster?" appeared in the *Boston Daily Globe*, stating that

> [t]he business office of old [...] has become a shop. To the typewriter a multitude of automatic machines has been added during the past few years. [...] We live in an age of time-saving, can write 10 times as fast as our ancestors, wash our clothes or our dishes by turning a switch, travel 200 miles in our own private vehicle instead of 20 miles in a wagon drawn by a pair of horses. [...] But what are we doing with the time and energy we save? [...] Do we live deeper or merely faster? (14)[89]

Within the overarching discourse of acceleration, the appeal for critical reflection included at the end of this comment on acceleration in America was rather exceptional. While the great majority of contemporary actors in various domains declared their ambition engage in this new form of American speed-pioneering, relatively few dared to question the new value of acceleration – or dared calling for a 'deeper' life, for instance a life enriched by spirituality or tradition.[90] In the 1920s, Nathan Asch, Mary Borden and Waldo Frank, however, did just that. Independently, all of them challenged the imperative of acceleration, addressed the detrimental effects of fast living and, through specific mechanisms, tried to prompt their readers to reflect critically upon acceleration as well as to re-validate forms of slowness that would 'deepen' their lives, enriching them with a sense of identity, historicity, community and, in Frank's case, spirituality in the age of acceleration. As I will elucidate in the second part of this study, each of these authors found innovative, yet unconventional ways to implement this generative agenda in their 1920s' novels. The two preceding chapters have provided specific thematic contexts that are referenced in *City Block*, *Flamingo* and *The Office*. In the following chapter, I turn to the domain of American avant-garde writing to elucidate why – and on what aesthetic and ideological grounds – Asch, Borden and Frank independently opted for an aesthetic of in-betweenness in the 1920s' novels that confounded many of their contemporaries.

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[89] The imperative of acceleration was circulated in the domain of the American (middle-class) home for instance by progressivist initiatives such as the Good Housekeeping Institute, which published a booklet on household engineering, as well as in book-length publications (by them and others): a "good housekeeper must bring to her task [...] every one of the qualities that make for a successful executive in the [...] business world" (Bentley 11, 5). Frank Gilbreth, pioneer of the efficiency movement, endorsed the cause when he wrote in the introductory comment to Christine Frederick's volume *Household Engineering* (1919) that "[t]here is nothing more worth while [sic!] than bringing efficiency into the home."

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[90] See for instance "The Speed Craze that Prevails" on the dangers of fast driving. See footnotes 59 and 78 for exemplary critical responses to fast trains and high-rise buildings.

II.C RE-SYNCHRONIZING AMERICAN LETTERS: THE NEXUS OF ACCELERATION AND CANONIZATION

Let's see words machinewise, let useless ones drop out.

Bob Brown. *The Readies*, 1930 (37)

While pioneers in moving picture production, city planning and American business were racing for recognition within the overarching discourse of acceleration, a number of American avant-garde writers came to the conclusion as well that only speed-up and constant innovation would guarantee that their own 'products' and their practice would continue to be of relevance in modern America. The introductory quote is taken from a visionary book about American literature in the modern age, which the poet Bob Brown published in 1930 after having worked on it in his "laboratory" for twenty-five years (*The Readies* 11): In the book, Brown presents a modernized textual form he calls 'the readie' that can be presented to readers as a "modern, moving, word spectacle" that approximates the "speed-rate of the present day" by a reading machine. Brown's extensive explications in the volume make it unmistakably clear that he was struggling to find a way of synchronizing American letters with the new popular medium of film; of bringing it up to speed with popular modern entertainment so it could be "enjoyed [...] in a manner as up to date as the lively talkies" (B. Brown, *The Readies* 27). Lest American letters lose their appeal in the age of speed, Brown's reading machine increases the pace at which individual words or phrases pass before the reader's eye to create an effect of movement and an experience of speed – just as film projectors had before them: "[M]icroscopic type on a movable tape is running beneath a slot equipped with a magnifying glass," Brown explains, to "mak[e] words more moving" (*The Readies* 13). To further enrich the presented material and thus intensify the rate of sensory stimulation, Brown uses techniques akin to those adopted by film serial and slapstick producers at the time: He eliminates both superfluous elements[91] and the space in-between words/thrills to reduce a sentence such as "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party" to "Timegood mencome aidparty" (*The Readies* 36).

Brown's vision demonstrates that actors in the field of American avant-garde letters felt the need to resynchronize their practices and 'products' during the first wave of acceleration, when actors in other domains were rushing ahead unstoppably. It seems that they realized, just as the Chicago-School sociologist Ernest W. Burgess did in 1932, that those who provided "recreational activities [at the time] tend[ed] almost inevitably, in the competition for patronage, to increase the emphasis upon stimulation," that is the acceleration of the receptive experience (*The Taxi-Dance Hall* xvi). Brown was not the only one who took action to meet this new challenge. A number of self- and time-conscious American writers revolutionized their techniques of creative production as well as their 'products' in order to keep up to speed in modern America – and they promoted themselves accordingly. In *The Readies*, Brown counts William Carlos Williams' and E.E. Cummings' texts among those that do not "lag behind" (28).[92]

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[91] Brown names "useless, conventional conjunctions, articles, prefixes, suffices, etc." (*The Readies* 36, cf. 52).

This chapter traces how a group of ambitious writers, among them Williams and Cummings, set out to prove those wrong who excluded the nation's avant-garde literature from the collective effort of speed-pioneering and agreed with Henry Ford that it was "foolish to require efficiency of [...] a poem" (*Ford Ideals* 393). The investigation will demonstrate that this prominent group of American writers thought it essential, rather than foolish, to adapt their production processes and texts to the new norms of acceleration, scientificity and constant innovation when it became ever more evident that "[g]reater Efficiency is the demand of the age, in manufacturing, in selling, in office management, in everything," as the author of the article "For Greater Efficiency" proclaimed in the May 27, 1914 issue of the *Washington Post* (4). Not only the threat that new, fast media such as film could outrank the long-standing medium of the written word but the emergence of discourses of acceleration in various other domains must have strengthened the certainty in these writers that they needed to take action if they wanted to rise to fame with their texts in modern America.

At the outset, this chapter will turn to Ezra Pound and Williams to scrutinize how these two self- and time-conscious writers based their verbal and non-verbal acts on the new value of acceleration, adapting their practice and rhetoric accordingly, to validate themselves within the overarching discourse of acceleration. Just as ambitious actors in the domain of early film, they established acceleration as a central characteristic in their texts for this purpose. Not only Pound's theory of Imagism and some of Williams' works will come under scrutiny to exemplify the techniques of textual acceleration introduced by these two actors. In addition, first insights will be given into the ways in which ambitious authors such as Williams set a dynamic of acceleration and conceptual consolidation into motion in their field by, for instance, bringing their primary texts into dialogue with other, non-literary texts, in which they comment on their approach and establish speed-up and innovation as the norms and imperatives for everyone in the domain. By revealing that various actors began to base their acts of validation and regulation on these very norms, this chapter will trace the domain-specific discourse of acceleration, as it materialized within the field, particularly in modernist magazines. Since I wish to assess how and why writers such as Asch, Borden and Frank fashioned themselves as writers of a different kind within this very discourse and opted for an aesthetic of in-betweenness in the 1920s, I will furthermore unearth the discursive processes through which less outspoken writers such as Cummings, leftist critics of modernity such as John Dos Passos or returned expatriates such as Stein became part of the American modernist elite while expatriates such as Pound were excluded from it.

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[92] A year later, both Cummings and Williams as well as Gertrude Stein contributed texts to the volume *Readies for Bob Brown's Machine*.

II.C.1 ACCELERATING AMERICAN LETTERS

At the turn of the century, a number of American writers began to revolutionize techniques of literary production in order to create texts that would both exemplify and express the dominant feature of the modern age: acceleration. Among the first to do so was Ezra Pound, who left his native country in 1909 in order to be inspired by the great upsurge in avant-garde experiments with style, form and movement in Europe. With his imagist technique, the expatriate put poetic style and form at the service of speed: he radically economized the linguistic material in his poems by "the way of the scientists," using "absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation," as Pound famously declares in his programmatic essay "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," which appeared in the newly-established journal *Poetry* in 1913 (203, 200).[93] With this technique, Pound explains in the essay, he tries to make his poems "instantaneously" "present[] an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" rather than describe it at length ("A Few Dont's" 200).[94] Pound's comments reveal the writer's self-confident intellectualism, which is reminiscent of contemporary filmmakers' and city planners' self-stylization as experts who devise quasi-scientific techniques of acceleration. Moreover, they bespeak stylistic and formal correspondences between Imagism and the Cinema of Attractions. Where early filmmakers fabricate short and thrilling filmic attractions, Pound's poems represent a condensed 'complex,' which they disclose both suddenly and forcefully to the reader. Although Pound refrains from using buzzwords such as 'thrill' in his programmatic essay and makes a confident claim about the highbrow status of his work, the imagist format he introduces resembles fast filmic attractions that were shown to American audiences at Nickelodeon theaters. The way in which Pound stylized himself as a literary efficiency-engineer in front of cultured *Poetry* readers – as a pioneer forging fast works through new quasi-scientific techniques – parallels early filmmakers' and city planners' self-validation. All of them, it seems, were aware of the new conception of American pioneering, which was inextricably linked to speed-up, the new value of the age.

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[93] It has become a popular anecdote among scholars of modernism that the two lines of "In a Station of the Metro" were the outcome of Pound's relentless work on the fifty lines that originally constituted the poem (cf. Wagner-Martin 6).

[94] Linda Wagner-Martin points out that Pound's "emphasis on *speed* gave new life to the post-Victorian poem that was sometimes buried in detail" (40).

Apparently reacting to the same transformation in American ideals and values, Pound's college friend William Carlos Williams[95] was beginning to ban classical forms from his texts at roughly the same time and adopted imagist techniques of condensation and exact wording to speed up his poetic structures, as for instance in "The Great Figure."

The formal and stylistic constitution of "The Great Figure" appears designed to both formally and stylistically exemplify and convey the new (experiential) pace at which modern American life unfolded. Similar to very early film attractions, Williams' poem provides a short-lived, thrilling encounter with a firetruck speeding past. Acceleration not only marks the poem's formal and stylistic setup (i.e., technical acceleration) and the receptive experience (i.e., the acceleration of life's speed) but its content as well (i.e., technological acceleration). With a total length of 13 short lines, the poem presents itself as an economized modern structure that maximizes its expressive capacity. Only thirty words, among them such onomatopoeic expressions as "gong," "clang" and "rumble," as well as one digit are employed to convey the encounter with the firetruck (78).[96] The amount of time the reader needs to read the poem is thus diminished. Williams' short imagist text appears specially designed to quickly transmit the impression to the reader.

The reading experience that the arrangement of these few words is, most likely, supposed to generate is marked by acceleration as well.[97] Short lines prompt the reader to move swiftly downwards on the page, from one line to the next, with her eyes. This downward progression traces the straight line of speed – the shortest connection between two points that modern city planners and businessmen favored as well (see chapter II.B). The lines in "The Great Figure," however, divert the straight downward movement of the eyes slightly on the vertical plane as they alternate between five and one word(s) in length. In this manner, the formal arrangement of Williams' poem intensifies the sensorial stimulation for the reader: the slight 'diversions' do not require her to re-focus constantly, which would potentially decelerate the reception process. They only demand her eyes to 'flutter' as they move quickly down the page – the formal arrangement of "The Great Figure" sets the eyes into motion. They constantly shift from one short line to the next, hence literally enacting the verb at the poem's center: 'moving.' This movement is most intense between line five and ten, where four one-word lines build a vertical sequence of terse modifiers that function as a cascade of visual stimulants.

The short length and the formal setup of the poem, which increases the rate at which things happen during the reading process, reveal that Williams devised a literary technique that enabled him to produce texts which reproduce the temporality of modern life for the reader – in this case the short-lived but thrilling experience of a firetruck speeding past. In his *Autobiography*, Williams recounts that this was exactly the experience which prompted him to write the poem in the first place: At an intersection of 9th Avenue, Williams remembers, "I turned just in time to see a golden figure 5 on a red background [i.e., the door of the firetruck] *flash by*. The impression was so *sudden and forceful* that I took a piece of paper out of my pocket and wrote a *short* poem about it" (172, emphases added). During the first wave of acceleration, when actors in other domains were developing ever novel accelerant techniques and presented ever faster products for others to validate, Williams and Pound seem to have felt the need to revolutionize their technique and texts as well. Acceleration is an essential feature that distinguishes their works from the literature of the past.

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[95] Pound, Williams and Hilda Doolittle had met at the University of Pennsylvania (cf. Williams, *Autobiography* 51).

[96] In his essay on the poem, Michael North mentions that Williams gradually economized the poem by eliminating the long line "with weight and urgency" ("Sign of Five" 329).

[97] I do not try to determine an empirical reading pace here. By looking at the stylistic (phonetics, grammar and syntax) and formal characteristics of a text, I examine how modernist word-structures pre-structure a specific receptive experience.

Whereas Pound collaborated with European modernists such as Wyndham Lewis and co-authored a *vorticist* extension to his imagist technique of re-synchronization,[98] Williams radicalized his technique to apply it to longer, narrative texts in America.[99] While Williams' imagist poems resemble early filmic 'attractions,' the composition of works such as *Kora in Hell* (1919) or *The Great American Novel* (1923) reveals striking correspondences with the accelerant techniques used in films that were produced during the transitional- and early classical eras: The principle of functional compression is combined with forms of narrative acceleration. While editing techniques as well as thrill-saturated plotlines set the fast *Takt* in these films, Williams' lyric prose texts arrange contracted poetic stills into a terse sequence to generate a sense of speed and movement. The following excerpt from *The Great American Novel* illustrates this technique:

> I am new, said she, I don't think you'll find my card here. You're new; how interesting. Can you read letters on that chart? Open your mouth. Breathe. Do you have headaches? No. Ah, yes, you are new. I'm new, said the oval moon at the bottom of the mist funnel, brightening and paling. I don't think you'll find my card here. Open your mouth – Breathe – A crater big enough to hold the land from New York to Philadelphia. New! I'm new said the quartz crystal on the parlor table – like glass – Mr. Tiffany bought a cart load of them. Like water or white rock candy – I'm new, said the mist rising from the duck pond, rising, curling, turning under the moon – Unknown grasses asleep in the level mists, pieces of the fog. Last night it was an ocean. Tonight trees. Already it is yesterday. Turned into the wrong street seeking to pass the power house from which the hum, hmmmmmmmmmmmmm –

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[98] Pound and Lewis presented their new technique in the first issue of *Blast* (June 1914) as well as in the *Fortnightly Review* (1914). In their conception of Vorticism, the human mind becomes the "substance receiving impressions" (Pound, "Vortex" 153), "a radiant node or cluster; [...] a vortex, from which and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing" (Pound, "from 'Vorticism'" 57) at the "point of maximum energy." At the same time, this new technique of expression upholds the quality of compression and fast transmission: The vortex "represents, as in mechanics, the greatest efficiency" (Pound, "Vortex" 153).

[99] Modernists such as Williams and Gertrude Stein emphasized the "*identity* between prose and verse" when it came to realizing techniques of acceleration in ever novel ways. Even if they admitted that some limitations needed to be recognized – "good poetry is where the vividness comes up 'true' like in prose but better" (Williams, "Notes" 67-68; "Introduction to The Wedge" 256) – they commonly maintained that "[i]t is not necessary to distinguish between the poet and the prose artist" (Williams, "Four Foreigners" 36; cf. Stein, *Lectures* 184; *Narration* 28).

> sprang. Electricity has been discovered for ever. I'm new, says the great dynamo. I am progress. I make a word. Listen! UMMMMMMMMMMMM –
> Ummmmmmmmmm – Turned into the wrong street at three A.M. lost in the fog, listening, searching – Waaaa! said the baby. I'm new. A boy! A what? Boy. (162)

Through a sequence of spotlights, this stream-of-consciousness narrative 'recounts' an evening and night in the life of a physician: The physician examines a new patient in his practice, notices the quartz crystal in the parlor, drives by a pond, a lawn and trees enveloped by mist, passes a power house in early morning and delivers a baby boy.[100] Where the film maker uses a cut to jump instantly to the subsequent thrill, Williams cancels out the time and space in-between the diverse 'attractions' (the episodes or impressions) along with time-consuming narrative mediation. As a result, acceleration materializes on the level of duration: The quoted passage requires less discourse time to cover a large quantity of story time.

The accelerant technique of Imagism further intensifies the experiential *Takt* in the quoted passage: Short sentences, often elliptical, eliminate superfluous words. They increase the amount of information that each line transmits and, thereby, increase the amount of stimulants per line ('Tonight trees;' 'Turned into a wrong street'). Just as thrill-a-minutes, which arrange the plot as a terse sequence of thrilling events (see chapter II.A.2), *The Great American Novel* presents (rather than narrates) only those instances that could count as novel.[101] This exemplary close reading of Williams' work through the lens of temporality reveals that the film scholar Miriam Hansen is right to propose that we need to consider how "various cultural practices [...] both articulated and mediated the experience of modernity" (69). Such a comparative approach reveals that acceleration emerged not only as a key feature in early films or city plans but also in this particular variant of modern American letters when ambitious actors in the field began to actualize the new value of acceleration within their 'products' and practices.[102]

Plainly, both the excerpt from *The Great American Novel* as well as fast cinematic texts appear designed to exhibit their modern quality (i.e., their formal and 'diegetic' speed; their quasi-scientific construction). By confronting the American public with these works, ambitious actors in both domains invited extrinsic validation within the overarching discourse of acceleration. Within this discourse, these actors seemed to hope, they would be recognized as American speed-pioneers. Self- and time-conscious writers such as Williams went even further to validate themselves, thereby establishing acceleration, scientificity and constant innovation as an imperative in their own field. They brought their primary texts into dialogue with programmatic texts to promote the former materially and rhetorically as structures of technical acceleration. Williams thereby turned his non-literary texts into “paratexts” (Genette 3), using them to clarify his own techniques and intentions. Thus, he aimed to ensure that the primary text would indeed be recognized as quintessentially modern and fast. In 1919, Williams published his prose-improvisations *Kora in Hell* serially in *The Little Review* (vols. 5.12, 6.1, 6.2). Notably, the first installment in the April 1919 issue was a prologue in which Williams clarifies what exactly *Kora* is to express and to represent. In the prologue, Williams establishes his association and cooperation with other prominent pioneers of American letters (Pound, Marianne Moore, H.D.) and he declares that good modern art requires a “freshness of presentation, novelty, [and] freedom” (“Prologue” 5, cf. 3). Williams clarifies his intention in *Kora* as follows:

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[100] For a discussion of 'automobile poems' written by Williams, in which the car features as a "machine of the visible meant to deliver non-stop images of surprise and pleasure," see Jon Chatlos' essay on "Automobility and Lyric Poetry" (151).

[101] See Chatlos' reading of Williams' poem "The Right of Way" as "enact[ing] a kind of continuity editing" (144).

[102] For another impressive example, see Williams' one-sentence, two-page-long poem "THEESSENTIALROAR" which appeared in the January 1928 issue of *transition*.

> It is to loosen the attention, my attention [...], that I write these improvisations. [...] The imagination goes from one thing to another. Given many things of nearly totally divergent natures but possessing one-thousandth part of a quality in common, provided that be new, distinguished, these things belong in an imaginative category and not in a gross natural array. To me this is the gist of the whole matter. [...] [T]he thing that stands eternally in the way of really good writing is always one: the virtual impossibility of lifting to the imagination those things which lie under the direct scrutiny of the senses, close to the nose. It is this difficulty that sets a value upon all works of art and makes them a necessity. The senses witnessing what is immediately before them in detail see a finality which they cling to in despair, not knowing which way to turn. Thus the so-called natural or scientific array becomes fixed [...]. He who even nicks the solidity of this apparition does a piece of work superior to that of Hercules when he cleaned the Augean stables. (“Prologue” 8–9)

In this passage, Williams identifies his achievement to ‘loosen’ his attention as a technique that sets modern American letters into motion: This cognitive technique actualizes (and potentially surpasses) the thrill-a-minute *Takt* of contemporary film in a modern prose-poem. In contrast to the scientific mind, which detains activity because it focuses only on the details of ‘things’ only, the writer’s mind constantly ‘lifts’ these ‘things’ into itself. It stays in motion at all times. In Williams’ view, the poet’s mind does not stay with the details of ‘things’ ‘close to the nose’ but, affected by external stimuli (i.e., the ‘things’), it gains a dynamic of its own – a self-propelling momentum: Once set into motion, the mind affects itself and leaps incessantly from one thought to another, only vaguely related thought (‘many things of nearly totally divergent natures’). The textual ‘variety format’ that results from such a technique of associative sprawl and the resultant self-affectation of the poet’s mind produces more than a static (‘fixed’) scientific recording of external stimuli: The ‘distance’ between divergent associations are erased; the text records the mind’s quick movement from one novel stimulant to the next.

The following excerpt illustrates that the text of *Kora* presents itself as one that the reader can easily relate to Williams’ preliminary comments:

> For what it's worth: Jacob Louslinger, white haired, stinking, dirty bearded, cross eyed, stammer tongued, broken voiced, bent backed, ball kneed, cave bellied, mucous faced – deathling, – found lying in the weeds "up there by the cemetery". "Looks to me as if he'd been bumming around the meadows for a couple of weeks." Shoes twisted into incredible lilies: out at the toes, heels, tops, sides, soles. Meadow flower! ha, mallow! at last I have you. (Rot dead marigolds – an acre at a time! Gold, are you?) Ha, clouds will touch world's edge and the great pink mallow stand singly in the wet, topping reeds and – a closet full of clothes and good shoes and my-thirty-year's-master's-daughter's two cows for me to care for and a winter room With a fire in it –. I would rather feed pigs in Moonachie and chew calamus root and break crab's claws at an open fire. (33)

It appears as though the exclamation "Speed! Speed!," which appears in a later part of *Kora*, governs the entire textual design of this passage (44). The idiomatic beginning is abruptly terminated and replaced by a descriptive sequence of surface-impressions in a succinct style. The sequence is condensed in terse one- or two-word subordinate clauses that substitute perceptive immediacy for conventional representations, the latter of which rely on extensive description and narrative mediation.[103] Two responses, cited directly in exact wording, enter abruptly – and at once, the breathless stream of associations and visual impressions rushes on to finally culminate in another succession of words at the end of the sentence. Already this first sentence produces a fast textual *Takt* by means of a sequence of tonal-temporal marks: The alliteration of the voiced bilabial stop [b] and the unvoiced alveolar stop [d] are interlocked in the passage 'dirty bearded, cross eyed, stammer tongued, broken voiced, bent backed, ball kneed, cave bellied, mucous faced.' Later on, the frequency of sound stimulation thus created is upheld by the repetition of sharp unvoiced alveolar fricatives in 'toes, heels, tops' and the double (i.e., initial and final) alliteration of the [z] sound in 'sides, soles.' The prose text provides the implied reader with a high rate of phonetic/auditory stimulation. The remainder of the passage from *Kora* presents itself as a series of frantic associative jumps, which are often unimpeded by full stops and interspersed with phonetic stimulants ('stand singly;' 'closet full of clothes;' 'chew calamus root and break crab's claws') or contractive genitive constructions ('my-thirty-year's-master's-daughter's two cows').

It is clear that Williams' experiment with style and form was inspired by the new imperatives of acceleration, constant innovation and scientificity. During the first wave of acceleration, the act of publishing texts such *Kora* (with its prologue) became a means of self-canonization. For self- and time-conscious writers, to publicly profess or show (in their literary texts) that they had technically increased the velocity of their texts, however, not only served the purpose of eliciting recognition within the overarching discourse of acceleration. Moreover, it established acceleration as the ultimate norm and imperative in the field, as the prologue to *Kora* and countless other paratexts demonstrate. Repeatedly, Williams stylized his own poems as "small or large machine[s] made of words" ("Author" 256), thus suggesting that modernist texts are technical systems of acceleration (rather than mass-produced products), and he urged his fellow writers that "[w]e should have a revolution of some sort in America every ten years. The truth [of the modern 'reality'] has to be redressed, re-examined, reaffirmed in a new mode" ("Against" 217).[104] These statements show that Williams used non-literary texts not only to establish American literary modernism as a practice dedicated to American speed-pioneering. His comments functioned as directive speech acts as well: they animated others in the field to turn modern American letters into textual-technical structures of speed and to constantly improve their technique.

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[103] In a 1961 interview, Williams comments on his desire to construct ever shorter "divisions of the line" or "shorter units" in contrast to Whitman's free verse lines that are still "too long for the modern poet" (Sutton 39).

II.C.2 CONCEPTUAL CONSOLIDATION AND CANONIZATION WITHIN THE DOMAIN-SPECIFIC DISCOURSE OF ACCELERATION

The texts quoted above reveal that Williams' discursive acts frequently appeared on the pages of modernist magazines. First established in Europe and the USA by writers eager to create an independently managed and -financed publication venue for experimental writing in the 1890s, these 'little magazines' evolved into the site where a discourse of acceleration emerged during the first wave of acceleration. Here, a dynamic of speed-up materialized as ambitious actors began to institute and reinforce the imperative to accelerate for everyone in their field by basing their own verbal and non-verbal acts as well as their positive and negative responses to others on this very imperative. In a primary phase of conceptual consolidation, these magazines became the discursive sphere where American literary modernism was established as an essentially uncritical practice which was adapted, in practically all respects, to the new norm of acceleration. Here, aspiring writers published experiments that defied the standards of mass-market, high-circulation magazines (cf. C. Beach 93; Monroe, "Motive" 28). These little magazines varied with regard to their lifespan, circulation[105] and setup, yet generally, they were conceived as a medium to circulate experimental texts among modern readers. As Pound noted affirmatively in 1913, little magazines were speeding up publishing cycles and rates of innovation, hence represented a specially designed "machinery for the circulation of printed expression" ("Patria" 131–132).[106] Williams, too, used a reference to technological acceleration to praise *The Little Review* in 1922: It gives him "a sense of being arrived, as of any efficient machine in motion" ("Reader" 59). It is indeed remarkable that both Pound and Williams attached importance to faster publishing cycles at a point in time when pictures at Nickelodeon theaters were exchanged on a daily basis and newspapers were speeding up their research- and printing methods. Although Williams did not explicitly address the fact that each issue of *The Little Review* arranged a variety of new multi-medial and cross-generic short forms (poems, narrative fragments, artwork, etc.), this common "collage aesthetic" (Nelsen 47; cf. Bennett 480) most likely prompted Williams and Pound to praise the medium in this manner. Their remarks indicate that both were aware that acceleration was essential to ensure their practice's relevance in the age of acceleration and they were careful about the metaphors they used to rhetorically establish the importance of these magazines.

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[104] In his 1919 article "Belly Music," Williams notes that the modernist approach singles out in each and every constituent of the modern world (be it machines or the natural world) an underlying technical mechanism: "[T]he one thing they [earlier or mediocre poets] have never seen about a leaf, is that it is a little engine. It is one of the things that make a plant GO" (26).

[105] While some little magazines ceased after only two issues (*Blast*), Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review* ran monthly issues for 15 years and Harriet Monroe's monthly *Poetry* (est. 1912) is still published today. The number of printed copies per issue ranges between a few hundreds (*Others*) and about five thousand (*Transatlantic Review*) but the number of progressive-minded subscribers was often considerably lower (cf. Leick 126).

[106] Little magazines were "always there, anxious for new material," Williams stated retrospectively in 1958, "and I was anxious to give it to them" (*I Wanted* 94). See the chapter on *The Little Review* in Morrisson, *Public* for an in-depth analysis of this strategy. Note that five years prior to Williams' response, Ezra Pound addressed a harsh critique at the alleged

During the heyday of modernism, little magazines were "instrumental in the creation of communities of like-minded writers and intellectuals" (C. Beach 93) – as trade journals were in the domain of early film or the *Wall Street Journal* in American business. In these magazines, for instance the self- and time-conscious group of American writers around Williams and Moore build stylistic and/or political alliances.[107] Through the discursive acts of validation and regulation they staged on the pages of these magazines, they tried collectively to establish a conception of American literary modernism that would legitimize their practice within the overarching discourse of acceleration in the long run. Little magazines perfectly accommodated the discursive acts that were essential to this process: Here, writers published their newest experiments as well as their programmatic essays (esp. *Poetry*, *Little Review*); in other specific sections, they could praise or rebuke the latest work of their fellow writers (*New Freewoman*, *Egoist*, *Poetry*, *Broom, Little Review*). *The Dial*, one of the most influential magazines in American arts and letters during the 1920s, even instituted a "fast track to canonization" by awarding the Dial Award to Moore, Cummings and Williams between 1924 and 1926 (Morrisson, "Nationalism" 26; cf. Willis, Introduction).

It has become a well-established contention in modernist studies that little magazines "set the stage for surprising collaborative efforts, wove webs of interaction and influence, set trends, established and ruined reputations, and shaped the course of modernism" (Churchill/McKible,

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state of *The Dial* to Anderson, editor of *The Little Review*: "*The Dial*, OH *gosh*, slosh, tosh, the dial, d,i,a,l, dial. Dial – the stationary part of a clock or chronometer" (*Letters* 169). Throughout the 1920s, *The Dial* was repeatedly attacked for its failure to encourage and support new experimental forms (cf. Golding 80).

[107] Chapter III.A.1 introduces the Seven Arts Group as a minor group of writers and intellectuals around Waldo Frank, which established their own little magazine, *The Seven Arts*, as a forum to promote a critical take on modern American culture. The novelists in the Seven Arts Group here even promoted, rather sketchily, a rival conception of modern American letters. The chapters on Frank and Asch furthermore introduce a number of ultra-leftist American magazines that constituted the ideological antithesis to magazines such as *The Little Review* or *The Dial* at the time.

"Little Magazines" 2; cf. C. Beach 93).[108] The parameters of value that were used by specific groups for the purpose of defining different modernisms at the time, however, still requires a more careful scrutiny. During the first two decades of the new century, the qualities that Williams commonly emphasized in his programmatic texts (i.e., speed, innovation, scientificity, efficiency) were also adopted by others to single out an American variant of literary modernism from the overwhelming sprawl of contemporary experiments in the transnational modernist scene. In the first issue of the international magazine *Broom*, for instance, an article by the Dutch poet Emmy Veronica Sanders appeared, in which she scolds 'the' American as an "emotion-abhorring depth-fearing machine man" who "unconditionally accept[s machine modernity] as sole counsels of perfection" because the "American Machine [is] transforming itself, with all its attributes and characteristics, into *American Mind*" ("America" 90, 89). Sanders proposes that American modernism's "strength (and weakness) lies along [exactly these] city-bred, machine-made, sophisticated, electric lines" that she sees, for instance, in Moore's work ("America" 89-90; cf. Jolas 192). Sanders' critical assessment is exemplary for a view that was common especially in Britain, where a "reference to American culture was usually connected with a censorious view of 'modern times,' because the United States were regarded as the spearhead of modernization," as Annemone Ligensa points out (165). Only five months after Sanders, the French filmmaker, theorist and literary critic Jean Epstein raised his voice in *Broom* as well to distinguish 'the American variant' from European modernisms. In a more neutral account titled "The New Conditions of Literary Phenomena," Epstein elaborates on the mental speed that Sanders critiques and that Williams promotes in the preface to *Kora*: Based on his analysis of the arrangement of "episodes" in different national cinemas and literatures, Epstein professes that American subjects have the highest "average mental speed" (5). Both Sanders' critique and Epstein's diagnosis indicate that (cognitive) speed was used as a parameter to distinguish the American variant of literary modernism.

Even though such a conception by no means accounted for the great variety of modernist experiments that were actually conducted in America at the time, there was a group of self- and time-conscious authors who toiled to establish increased (cognitive) speed, constant innovation and scientificity as the distinguishing features of American modernism. In the face of the "chaotic maze of antagonistic currents, emotions, ideas and forms of expression" that emerged in the literary field at the time (Emrich qtd. in Eysteinsson 52), these writers programmatically managed, regulated and, finally, established a conception of American literary modernism that would be recognized within the overarching discourse of acceleration in the long run. For this purpose, these writers converged the function of author and censor until there was simply "no transition between" the two, as Williams put it at the time ("More" 20; cf. Moore, "*Dial*" 109). Certain formal-aesthetic features came to distinguish legitimate forms of experiment while others were either rebuked or pushed out of the critical focus. Moore's regular comments, reviews and essays during her editorship at *The Dial* (1925-1929) provide a record of this development: Moore praised instances where the artist produced novelty in a quasi-scientific exactitude by a "force of omission," an "economy of exposition," and a "sense of simplifying rather than of complication [...] [or] 'decoration'." Noteworthy American modernists did this for the sake of textual velocity, hence a "triumph of tempo and terseness," Moore claimed time and again ("Comment [Sept. 1925]" 153; "Historic" 109; "It Is Not" 51; "Comment [April 1926]" 163; "Comment [May 1926]" 165).[109] In the substantial amount of criticism that Moore published, she established increased speed, constant innovation and scientificity as distinctive criteria of American modernism. At the time, Moore used these criteria to pick out of the overwhelming experimental sprawl in the literary field, out of the "contradictory, communal messiness" (North, "Transatlantic" 23), those texts and practices that would elicit praise for modern American letters within the overarching discourse of acceleration.

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[108] For a more extensive analysis of this process, see the typescript of Michael North's paper "Transatlantic Transfer: Little Magazines and Euro-American Modernism," delivered at the Modernist Magazines Conference (De Montfort University, Leicester, UK. 12 July 2007) and now available on the *Modernist Magazines Project* website.

Writers who were just developing their own techniques of acceleration to synchronize their texts with modern life (H.D., Ezra Pound, Williams or Harriet Monroe) joined Moore's effort of conceptual consolidation by, for instance, validating each other's technique and aesthetic as groundbreaking advances in textual acceleration, thereby setting into motion a dynamic of acceleration on the level of discourse. Using the same criteria and rhetoric as Moore (and, in extension, city planners and film critics), each of their acts functioned as a directive: it animated other actors in the field to focus on acceleration in their acts of validation as well as regulation. These ambitious author-critics applauded the directness of expression in Moore's poems as well as their formally and stylistically novel composition (cf. H.D. 20; Pound, "New Poetry" 25; Williams, "Prologue" 5). Commonly, these author-critics singled out the technical feats that Moore, the "perfect technician," had devised to speed up her poetic structures (H.D. 20; cf. Monroe, "Symposium" 36): "This is new!" and "it is modern" revels Williams in his essay "Marianne Moore," which may have boosted Moore's appeal for the position of editor at *The Dial*, where the essay appeared shortly before her actual appointment. Drawing an analogy to his own technique of associative sprawl, Williams furthermore praises in his essay that in Moore's poems, "[t]he old stops are discarded [...], there is a multiplication, a quickening, a burrowing through, a blasting aside, a dynamization, a flight over" in a "rapidity of movement" (131, 121, 123). To underscore the great quality of the scarcely interrupted run-on lines, intricate sound- and light rhyme patterns as well as of the immediate juxtaposition of associative thoughts and quotes in poems such as "Marriage," Williams even uses an evocative analogy to urban rapid-transit in his essay: Moore's poetry is an "anthology of transit [...] [that] gives the impression of a passage through. There is a distaste for lingering, [...] a rapidity too swift to touch" (123; cf. H.D. 20).[110] Already this relatively small compilation of quotes and references demonstrates that there occurred a remarkable rhetorical alignment in the critical discourse on this particular variant of American literary modernism. In their acts of extrinsic validation, author-critics such as Williams or Monroe, but also Moore herself, employed a relatively fixed set of criteria and used a rhetoric that was easy to recognize and to imitate. In their sum, these acts produced a consensus about what should be considered American literary modernism. Furthermore, they constantly reminded other actors in the field that they needed to signal their compliance with the norms and imperatives upon which these value judgments were based as well if they wanted to rise to a rank of canonicity.

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[109] See the following essays by Moore as well: "A Draft;" "Bright;" "Compactness;" "Conjuries That Endure;" "New."

The case of Cummings is a case in point. Cummings never pursued self-canonization as eagerly as Williams, for instance, yet his experimental texts offered themselves to be read as novel realizations of speed-up in American letters.[111] For example, Cummings' lyrical portrait "I Pianist," which appeared in *Broom*'s July 1922 issue and was re-published a year later in the volume *Tulips and Chimneys*, presents its subject matter to the readers in a contracted form.

Four visual impressions (toe, back, eyes, hands) are strung together in a terse series of words, which flow down the page in the first three stanzas. In each succinct stanzaic unit, the lines are composed of a mere letter or a small unit of letters. As in "The Great Figure," such a form invites the reader to move quickly downward from line to line. Cummings' poem particularly reinforces the need for such a quick downward movement as words within it are stretched along two or more lines. They can only be recomposed by the reader through a relatively fast descend: the stretched-out words "ta/ppin/g/toe" in the first quatrain, "hip/popot/amus Back" in the tercet and "gen/teel-ly/lugu-/brio us" in the last quatrain draw the reader's eyes quickly downward on the page (306). Instead of a rhyme scheme or meter, a sequence of unvoiced plosives sets a fast tonal *Takt* in Cummings' poem. At the end of the second stanzaic unit, the capitalized 'Back' sets a visual mark, abruptly terminating the previous cascade of auditory stimulants. The subsequent stanza immediately launches a new alliterative sequence of [l] sounds. The last, monosyllabic word of the phrase ("eyes") stands on its own in a widely indented line before the tonal *Takt* culminates in a capitalized line that erases all otiose time and space between the three words it holds: "LOOPTHELOOP" (306). The maximum of spatial economy and textual stimulation effected here reoccurs in varied form in the closing line. With a combination of tonal, orthographic and formal experiments, "I Pianist" presents itself as a fast and modern poem that is designed to produce a sensory rush for *Broom* readers. It not only employs already relatively established techniques of textual acceleration (i.e., imagist concision, formal arrangement) but it also presents novel techniques (tonal sequencing, lineation, merging of words, capitalization, hyphenation, punctuation). In 1922, "I Pianist" presented itself as a text that practically invited author-critics in and beyond *Broom*, who were eager to consolidate American literary modernism as a fast and technically innovative practice, to validate it accordingly.

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[110] Prior to Williams' eulogy, Monroe, the editor of *Poetry*, identified "a coruscating succession of ideas" in Moore's poems ("Symposium" 39). Three years later, the American poet, novelist and critic Glenway Wescott wrote that her "work is the product of a novel intelligence [...][;] the exploitation of an environment by a mind" (50; cf. R. Adlington). In his introduction to *Selected Poems*, T. S. Eliot praises Moore for "so quick a process of association" ("Introduction" 62).

[111] Cummings' commencement address when graduating from Harvard represents one of the rare occasions of self-validation: In it, he associates himself with contemporary pioneers of acceleration in the arts by praising "The New Art" in such literary works as Stein's *Tender Buttons* and Amy Lowell's imagist poems, Marcel Duchamp's cubist paintings of movement as well as Anna Pavlova's high-speed dance performances (C. Beach, *The Cambridge Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Poetry* 94). See Moore's 1944 essay on the Russian prima ballerina for *Dance Index* entitled "Anna Pavlova."

In view of this, it is not surprising that Brown invited Cummings to contribute a 'readie' to his collection *Readies for Bob Brown's Machine* at the end of the decade. From the early 1920s onwards, Cummings' poetry was acclaimed by prominent author-critics. In her review of *1x1*, Moore rejoices "I am abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement" in the work and of the "ambidextrous compactness" that it represents. She calls him an "athlete of the speedograph" ("*One Times One*" 141, 142; "People Stare" 125).[112] In her review of *XLI Poems*, Moore even reprints "I Pianist" as a whole to illustrate the "kind of engineering" that Cummings' technique represents for her ("People Stare" 127). In his 1922 review "Off the Shoals," John Dos Passos similarly praises Cummings' first novel *The Enormous Room* (1922) for its "style[,] infinitely swift [...] with indelible vividness" ("Off the Shoals" 35) and in her review of Cummings' modernist travelogue *Eimi* (1933), Moore applauds the radicalization of technique she sees within it: the "whole thing marvelously whirls and this total supreme whirl is made of subsidiary, differently timed yet perfectly intermeshing, whirlings" ("Penguin" 301). Only a few pages from Cummings' portraits in *Broom*, another critical essay by Sanders appeared, in which she once again rebukes an American culture in which "the Crowd [...] ha[s] learned to model both their toil and their 'amusement' [...] on the brutal extremes of [...] insane noise, fierce glares and lights, incessant motion" ("Fourth of July" 287). Writing from the American perspective in the same year, Dos Passos marvels at the way Cummings' aesthetic replicates the sensory thrill upon which the appeal of such a life of amusement rests, in his view. In his laudatory essay "Off the Shoals," he compares Cummings' "experiments" with the attractions for which people "step on each other's heels crowding round slot machines in their haste to submit to a new sensation" (33).[113] On the relatively few occasions when Cummings spoke about his aesthetic principles, he implicitly endorsed such a reading by declaring that he indeed aimed to outdo the hyper-stimulation and novelty of contemporary popular amusements with his texts: "It is with roses and locomotives(not to mention acrobats Spring electricity Coney Island [...])that my 'poems' are competing" ("[Foreword to is 5]" 221).[114] Cummings' innovative use of style and form as well as his occasional self-validation established him in the field. It revealed that also he was dedicated to speed-pioneering in the domain of American letters: His texts transmitted more with fewer words and in less time, supplying the reader with a cascade of stimulants.

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[112] Such laudations effectively overruled occasional negative reviews, as the one by the American writer, literary and social critic Edmund Wilson, who decried Cummings' style as a sign of "immaturity" ("Wallace" 45).

While self- and time-conscious author-critics thus established Cummings as a member of the modernist elite, they regulated and critiqued those who were aspiring to fame but did not meet the criteria of American literary modernism, which they were just establishing. From early on, the little magazines became sites of public contestation and affirmation, but also of regulation: Here, author-critics reproved conventionality, imprecision, convolution, textual elongation as well as formal and stylistic "[f]atigue" (Williams, "Carl Sandburg's" 278; cf. Moore, "Thistles;" "Review"). Through the interactive setup of the magazines, counter-discursive tendencies could instantly be met with reproof; they could be exposed as irreconcilable with the American project of speed-pioneering, to which literary modernism was contributing, as author-critics asserted. Already in the January 1914 issue of *Poetry*, the imagist Amy Lowell critiqued the fact that the distinguishing features of American modernism were being fixated ever more firmly within the domain-specific discourse, so that even some influential expatriates were scolded as "un-American" ("Nationalism" 33). Among these was Pound, one of Lowell's principal influences. Although Pound had developed the revolutionary technique of Imagism, had often compared his poetic principles to modern systems of (technical) acceleration, had declared his indebtedness to Henry Ford's "experiment[s] in tempo" and had voiced great faith in an American artistic renaissance, he was frequently met with hostility in the domain-specific discourse after his emigration ("Machine" 81, cf. 51, 57, 79; "Gather" 23–24; *Letters* 44; "Patria;" "Renaissance").[115] Beside his political orientation and his coterie, part of the reason was, it seems, that American (author-)critics felt that a quality "definitely and singularly American [...] was [only] the secret of Pound's *early* success in London," as Williams famously proclaimed in 1921 ("Yours" 34, emphasis added). As Pound verbally attacked America,[116] rooted his poetic practice in the emotion to be expressed rather than in the world of machine-modernity (cf. Golston 44), focused on tradition and history and began to associate himself with an international modernist project rather than an American one (cf. Pound, "from 'Vorticism'" 55; Pound, "Tradition"),[117] some who had stayed behind thought it necessary to curtail Pound's influence in America. For example the expatriate's announcement that he would take up the foreign editorship for the *Little Review* in the June 1917 issue propelled a number of so-called reader critics into the discursive arena, prompting them to defend their own devotion to the American acceleratory project: "I have great faith in the artistic life of America and I don't think Ezra Pound's notions of it are very healthy," wrote the reader critic O.D.J. (27).[118] In the same issue of the *Little Review*, the American poet and novelist Maxwell Bodenheim attacked Pound for ignoring the progress and innovation in the work of such American-based imagists as "Fletcher, Marianne Moore, Williams," among others, and for focusing his praise on a fellow expatriate, namely T.S. Eliot ("Poet" 28). In the next issue, another reader critic even saw it necessary to caution the editor Harriet Monroe that "[a]ll the things Pound sends you are in a way propaganda" ("Reproach") – an allegation Pound himself contested in the October issue ("Letters from Ezra Pound" 37-38). Even if the wave of critique that came rolling towards Pound in the *Little Review* soon ebbed away, it illustrates that allegedly 'aberrant,' un-American modernists were met with reproof within the discourse of acceleration that was emerging in the domain of American avant-garde letters. The regulatory acts that were employed to fend off these actors further established American literary modernism as a nationalist and enthusiastically progress-oriented movement, alerting everyone else in the field that only a compliance with these norms would save them from similar assaults. Quite paradoxically, those who emancipated themselves from the rigid literary conventions of the past established a new set of imperatives and norms during the first wave of acceleration. The modernist revolution, at least as it was stylized in this specific case on the level of discourse, seemed to be a sort of adaptation, albeit a radically experimental one, to contemporary norms and values: speed-up was discursively established as a key feature of American literary modernism during the first acceleratory wave.

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[113] Cummings often underlined the imperative of constant innovation in this process. In 1922, he wrote to his sister that "TO DESTROY IS ALWAYS THE FIRST STEP IN ANY CREATION" (*Selected* 86). In *I Six Nonlectures*, he retroactively determines this imperative as a pillar of modernist practice: "'an artist [...] MUST PROCEED.' Proceed: not succeed" since success "cannot concern him otherwise than as a stimulus to further" (81, 82, cf. 43, 45).

[114] In his article "The Adult, the Artist and the Circus," published in *Vanity Fair*'s October 1925 issue, Cummings himself cautions: "let us never be fooled into taking seriously that perfectly superficial distinction which is vulgarly drawn between the circus-show and 'art' or 'the arts.' Let us not forget that [...] their common function is the expression of that supreme alive-ness which is known as 'beauty'" (57).

[115] For a late example, see for instance Matthew Josephson's "Open Letter to Mr. Ezra Pound, and the Other 'Exiles'" in the May 31, 1928 issue of *transition*.

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[116] He did so especially in letters to American actors. Writing to Williams in 1917, Pound lamented having "the virus, the bacillus of the land in my blood" and only two years later, he had Marianne Moore know that he "[m]ust let it alone (I must). Must return to the unconcern with U.S.A. that I had before 1911-12" (*Letters* 181, 210). To H.L. Mencken, he wrote in 1916 that "[t]he *country* U.S.A. is hopeless and may go to hell" (*Letters* 150). In the essay "The City" (1928), an alteration between association ('our') and dissociation ('their') and a more pessimistic tone bespeaks Pound's growing disaffiliation.

[117] See for instance his letters to *Poetry* editor Harriet Monroe (cf. *Letters*) or the *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (1954). For an in-depth investigation of Pound's (and Eliot's) interest in history, see James Longenbach's study *Modernist Poetics of History: Pound, Eliot and the Sense of the Past.*

[118] See 'The Reader Critic' section in the July 1917 issue. In the next issue, V. H. feared that the contents of *The Little Review* were becoming "Too British" with Pound as the foreign editor (24). In the November 1918 issue, Jane Heap reported "a great many [...] suffer loudly and continually over Mr. Pound" (35).

Reductive Tendencies in the Critical Discourse on American Literary Modernism

All throughout the first two decades of the new century, the ambitious projects of self-canonization pursued by avant-garde writers further propelled the dynamic of validation within the field, encouraging a larger group of critics to get involved in the discursive consolidation of American literary modernism. When Williams, for instance, introduced the technique of associative sprawl across three subsequent issues of *The Little Review* and published *Kora in Hell* as a volume a year later, he created a whole series of occasions for extrinsic validation – as the city planner George B. Ford did when he was trying to gain financial and institutional support for a city planning commission (see chapter II.B.1). Williams' decision to use a prologue as the first installment that reverts to the value criteria which he, Moore and others were just establishing demonstrates that the author was eager to steer the critical response to his work. In the material he published serially, readers could repeatedly retrace the distinctive qualities of American literary modernism. Unsurprisingly, not only author-critics such as Moore responded to Williams' ambitious series of self-validation and backed the author by confirming that "[c]ompression, colour, speed, accuracy" were indeed the "qualities" she found in *Kora* (Moore, "Kora in Hell" 56).[119] Kenneth Burke, too, who had preceded Moore as editor of *The Dial*, marveled at "the trimness of the wording" in Williams' work (here *Sour Grapes*) and the way in which his texts express that he "was engaged in discovering the shortest route between object and subject." Referencing Williams' idea of associative sprawl, Burke calls the author the "master of the glimpse" who "sees [and presents] everything in a flash" ("Heaven's" 109, 108, 107, 107).[120]

Moore and Burke's responses identify in Williams' work the distinctive qualities, which the author himself was propagating at the time. At the same time, however, these two acts of extrinsic validation illustrate a tendency in the critical discourse, which would become one of the central triggers not only for Asch and Borden, but also for Frank to opt for an aesthetic of in-betweenness in their 1920s' experimental novels: critics' tendency to focus on a set of predominantly formal-aesthetic qualities that would legitimize texts such as *Kora* within the overarching discourse of acceleration. Indeed, not only author-critics but also other prominent literary critics of the day adopted these qualities as criteria of value, setting a secondary process of conceptual consolidation into motion and amplifying the dynamic of acceleration within the field.

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[119] Moore repeatedly used potent metaphors from the domain of speed machines to emphasize Williams' skillful 'engineering of American letters' as well as the machine-like movement that dominated his compositions: "The welded ease of his compositions resembles the linked self-propelled momentum of sprocket and chain" ("Vein" 345); within them, the "compression which propels the steam engine, is a main force" ("Things" 131).

[120] Earlier in the review, Burke states that "[t]he process is simply this: There is the eye, and there is the thing upon which the eye alights; while the relationship existing between the two is a poem" ("Heaven's" 197).

Among these critics were Gorham B. Munson, Denis Donaghue, Matthew Josephson, Paul Rosenfeld, Randal Jarrell and Burke himself. As they joined in acclaiming experimental authors by drawing on a set repertoire of value criteria as well as labels and descriptive phrases, they established a particular variant of modern American writing – quite reductively – as a canonical, essentially uncritical practice that was adapted, in practically all respects, to the new American norm of acceleration. In nearly all of their responses, these literary critics not only underlined the American[121] and optimistic[122] quality of Williams or Moore's texts. They moreover focused their praise on the value of constant innovation in technique,[123] the remarkable speed of the text (i.e., the "propulsion" created on different levels) as well as the quasi-scientific techniques that modern American writers seemed to use to accelerate their word-structures (Munson, "William" 108).[124] This exemplary compilation of references in the footnotes reveals that author-critics such as Williams and Moore were rewarded for their efforts in the primary phase of conceptual consolidation and self-canonization: Early literary critics helped to establish a relatively rigid conception of American literary modernism, authorized the movement's avant-garde position in American speed-pioneering and included writers such as Williams and Moore in a prospective modernist canon.

Certainly, this tendency to focus on a set of predominantly formal-aesthetic qualities can be attributed to the general vogue of professionalization and technical acceleration at the time: engineers and speed-typists were celebrated as the heroes of the age in American newspapers (see chapter I). At least partly, however, it can also be understood as a reaction to the programmatic texts that author-critics circulated in little magazines at the time. On some occasions, these texts were even used by critics as a material to quote from or to paraphrase for the purpose of backing their claims and readings in reviews (see Donoghue; Munson, "William") – some critics at the time even addressed the fact that authors published these texts to encourage this (see Burke, "Impartial" T. H. Carter and Warren). So when Williams likened his approach to that of engineers in an address to Bell Telephone executives (cf. Steinman, *Made* 51) or, together with Moore, voiced the contention that American modernism conforms aesthetically with the temporal quality of modern life, they invited critics to focus on the formal-aesthetic qualities of their work. When Moore cited Burke, who had said that the modernist "artist does not run counter to his age; rather, he refines the propensities of his age, formulating their aesthetic equivalent"[125] ("Comment [Jan. 1929]" 214) or when Williams declared that a text is "important only as evidence, in its structure, of a new world which it has been created to affirm" ("Against" 196),[126] they reduced it to formal-aesthetic properties as well, inviting critics to do the same.

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[121] For Williams, see Bunting 136; Daiches; Jarrell, "Best Thing" 177, "[On the America]" 170; Lowell, "Sort of Anti-Cantos;" Munson, "William" 95; P. Rosenfeld, "Fleeting Patterns" 162-63. For Moore, see Bogan 144; Donoghue 166; Pearch 151.

[122] For Williams, see Callaghan; Munson, "William" 104. For Moore, see Pearch 158.

[123] For Williams, see Munson, "William" 94, Rice 128. For Moore, see Donoghue 167.

[124] For Williams, see Deutsch 130; Martz; Nims; Rice 129; Walton 151. For Moore, see Blackmur 82; Bogan "American" 144; Burke, "Motives" 98; Jarrell, "Her Shield" 120; Ransom, "On Being Modern With Distinction" 104. William Slater Brown noted that the "formal beauty" of Cummings' work (here *Tulips and Chimneys*) resides in "that quality common to racing cars [and] aeroplanes" (39).

Many early reviews, indeed, gave little room to the critical dimensions that exist even in a work such as *Kora*, which denounces for instance the approach "to turn to art from [...] a science doing slavey service upon gas engines" (*Kora* 16). Despite Williams' programmatic self-stylization as a pioneer in poetic speed-engineering, his work was, at times, critical of modernity.[127] Lisa Steinman points out, too, that Williams "claim[ed] [...] that technological and scientific modernity – including everything from indexing systems to skyscrapers – can or should provide American writers with a climate in which they might define modernity for the arts," yet "[e]lsewhere in his writings he echoes the more negative judgments of American technology" ("Modern" 211). Seth Moglen similarly confirms that "there are aspects of Williams's poetics that make him assimilable to the dominant melancholic strand within U.S. modernism," which "recorded the psychic injuries that accompanied this process of economic transformation," because he was "hostile throughout his career to the economic structures that bred poverty and alienation" (81, 5, 82). For the purpose of legitimizing American literary modernism within the overarching discourse of acceleration, it seems however, these formal-aesthetic qualities were overemphasized in the early critical discourse on American modernism.

Another reason for this decentralization of counter-discursive dimensions might have been that the speed aesthetic as such invited readers to overlook the critical undercurrents in the work, as in slapstick comedies (see chapter II.A.2). The composer and poet Helen Birch-Bartlett addresses this problematic effect in her 1921 review of *Kora*:

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[125] Consider Williams' contention that in contrast to poetry of the past, which was moral, meaningful, "decorated and detailed," the modernist work "has, *justly*, no 'meaning.' It is a work of art. And that is precisely its significance" ("Refinement" 119, emphasis added; cf. "Excerpts from a Critical Sketch" 109; "Poem" 288; Stein, *Lectures* 51).

[126] In *Sentimental Modernism*, Suzanne Clark perceptively notes that "[m]odernism practiced a politics of style, but it denied that style had a politics" (5). As Milton A. Cohen shows with regard to Williams, however, the author "was more willing to recognize that poetry had a social responsibility" by 1934 "although this recognition was [still] couched in concessions and dependent clauses" (145).

[127] Critical dimensions emerged more strongly in Williams' later work, for instance in the poem "Perpetuum Mobile: The City" (1936) or in *Paterson* (1946-58). See for instance Williams' description of businesspeople in *Paterson*'s fourth book as those who "stand torpid in cages [elevators], in violent motion unmoved/ but alert! /predatory minds, unaffected" (165). These dimensions were more readily acknowledged in post-depression criticism. Robert Lowell calls *Paterson* "Whitman's America, grown pathetic and tragic, brutalized by inequality, disorganized by industrial chaos, and faced with annihilation" ("On Williams' 'Platonism'" 190) and William van O'Connor adds: "If Williams had been an Elizabethan he would have written broadsheets about London life, about two-headed children, strange murders, and the seamy underside of city life" (30). Cohen's article "Stumbling into Crossfire" discusses Williams' involvement with the political left since the Depression. In the chapter "The Rage for Order" in the study *Modernism from Right to Left*, Alan Filreis shows how more radically left writers and critics (i.e., Wallace Stevens) critiqued Williams' objectivist, so-called proletarian portraits for their display of a "sentimentality born of mere empirical observation of external details" (Morris Schappes qtd. in Filreis 143). For reviews that still focus on Williams' formal-aesthetic innovations and his fast style, see for instance Fitts; Honig; Lowell, "Sort of Anti-Cantos;" Martz; I. Rosenfeld.

> The book holds many sadnesses and bitternesses between its covers [...]. Even though at conception they must have leaned with all their powerful weight upon the pen [...], his [Williams'] chosen words, which contain and impart them, flip and flick and dance and dart about, so that the image of Mr. Williams [...] becomes curiously that of a dancer waving a spotted scarf. (330)

Birch-Bartlett's comment suggests that Williams' technique of textual acceleration engenders a fast, uncritical receptive experience because the manifold stimuli, which the text arranges in dense sequence, engage the reader's attention at all times – like a spotted scarf that flutters before his eyes. It 'tickles' his senses rather than inviting him to engage in critical reflection. In his essay "Marianne Moore," Williams himself endorses such a "thrilling" effect: The way "[i]t grows impossible for the eye to rest long" when reading her poems, he notes, gives him "satisfaction" (126, 124). Such an effect, however, potentially diverts the reader's attention from the 'sadnesses' and 'bitternesses' included in the experimental work, undermining its critical potential, as Birch-Bartlett perceptively suggests. Williams' programmatic way of focusing his readers' attention on techniques of textual acceleration in the prologue to *Kora* certainly reinforced this effect: It diverts their attention even more from the text's critical dimensions although they might have 'leaned with all their powerful weight upon the pen' when Williams wrote the text. Not only the impression that a hyper-accelerated aesthetic facilitated an uninvolved enjoyment but also critics' tendency to disregard counter-discursive elements inspired authors such as Waldo Frank to devise an alternate aesthetic in the 1920s – a hybrid aesthetic, that is, which was specially designed to sensitize readers to the downsides of speed.

The impression that critical assessments of highly experimental capitalist critiques, such as Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*, tended to ignore the counter-discursive dimensions in these works provided another central impetus for writers to devise such an aesthetic in the 1920s.[128] In the major organs of modernism and in other American magazines (*Saturday Review of Literature*, excluding Marxist magazines, of course), reviewers eager to canonize *Manhattan Transfer* as an exemplar of American modernism drew on a set repertoire of value criteria as well as labels and descriptive phrases that would resonate within the domain-specific discourse; they focused on the formal-aesthetic features of the novel, hence the dimension in which the novel was most obviously in accord with the prevalent conception of American modernism. These reviewers either largely disregarded or played down the leftist critique of capitalism in Dos Passos' novel.[129]

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[128] I restrict my investigation to the early critical reception of *Manhattan Transfer* here in order to assess the dynamic within the domain-specific discourse of acceleration during the 1920s – the decade during which other writers devised their alternate practice. After the stock market crash of 1929, also non-Marxist reviewers addressed the leftist critique in Dos Passos' new (i.e., his *U.S.A.* trilogy [1930-36]) and older novels much more openly. See for instance Cowley, "Afterthoughts;" Cowley, "The Poet;" Hicks, "Dos Passos' Gifts;" Josephson, "Marxist Epic;" Rees.

[129] See for instance the review by Michael Gold, the assistant editor of *New Masses*, who detects "pages of keen social rebellion and proletarian consciousness" in *Manhattan Transfer* and advises Dos Passos, "the propagandist of truth," to join the labor movement in order to work out his agenda ("[Rev. of *Manhattan*]" 74).

As an experimental text, *Manhattan Transfer* offered ample proof that Dos Passos was committed to the revolution of American letters in the age of speed. Acceleration marks its formal and stylistic composition. The novel confronts the reader with a plethora of both established and novel forms of textual acceleration: Colloquial dialogical voices contract words to the utmost,[130] the space between words is erased[131] and the sensual experience of the metropolis registers in an economized, kinetic style. Already the title *Manhattan Transfer*, in fact, suggests that the text represents a novel experiment in textual speed-up because it refers to a New Jersey train station that served as an entry to New York's rapid transit system at the time.[132] Even before the novel was published, Dos Passos' publisher Harper announced *Manhattan Transfer* as "a highly impressionistic study of American life, in the Joyce manner" (Loveman 224). When it was finally available in bookstores, an advertisement appeared in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, in which Sinclair Lewis is cited claiming that "the literary analyst must take [the novel] as possibly inaugurating, at long last, the vast and blazing dawn we have awaited" (19 Dec. 1925). Another ad, printed in the December 1925 issue of *The American Mercury*, stylizes *Manhattan Transfer* as a "book which so faithfully mirrors the ever-shifting panorama of New York life" through a technical "achievement [that] is one of singular originality, [...] a contribution to the new literature." Dos Passos' novel not only offered itself stylistically and formally to be read as a modernist text. It was also marketed accordingly: as an aesthetically novel work, rather than as a socio-critical account of urban life in the age of acceleration.

Just as Sinclair Lewis, a remarkable number of American reviewers focused primarily on the formal-aesthetic dimension of Dos Passos' novel, bestowing special attention and praise on those techniques that seemed to accelerate style, form and the receptive experience. In his 1929 article "A Decade of American Fiction," for instance, Burke mentions shortly that Dos Passos' novel addresses "beaneries, seduction in the slums, low-visioned ambitions, thefts, brawls, dirty tricks," yet he focuses on the novel's innovations in prose writing: "John Dos Passos abandons his earlier, descriptive style," Burke explains and he adds that Dos Passos' progress makes the novel "rise[] to the category of excellence through the sheer efficiency" it reveals as a literary text. *Manhattan Transfer*'s speed, Burke claims, is rooted in the way thrilling plot elements are arranged in a terse sequence: "Dos Passos contributes a new quickness to narrative, by a succession of pointed episodes, lives glimpsed preferably at moments of change or decision" ("Decade" 567). With such a carefully-worded explication, Burke validated the author as a speed-pioneer of

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[130] "His wife's in that buildin';" "You're pretty near late, d'you know that?;" "I wouldn't let you in on it, xept you an me's been pretty good friends an I owe you money an everythin" (*Manhattan* 25, 29, 106).

[131] "It was a narrowwindowed sixstory tenement. The hookandladder had just drawn up" (*Manhattan* 24).

[132] In "The Reader's Guide" section of *Saturday Review of Literature*, May Lamberton Becker confirmed that the novel's "very title calls to the mind of anyone using local means of transportation a place where everyone is going somewhere and nobody stays, [...] a centre of hurried exchanges" (861).

American prose and alerted readers of *The Bookman*, where his article appeared, to the properties that qualified Dos Passos for this status: The ambition to revolutionize his technique in short intervals, a commitment to progress and, finally, an abidance by the imperative of time-economy.

With this retrospective appraisal of Dos Passos' novel, Burke seconded a number of other (author-)critics, who had used the same value criteria, labels and descriptive phrases to discursively elevate the author to a rank of canonicity in earlier reviews, which focus primarily on the formal-aesthetic dimension of *Manhattan Transfer*. In a front-page commentary in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, *Manhattan Transfer* is for instance presented as a novel that, in its "most characteristic aspect[, is a] careful imitation[] of the contemporary scene where the attempt is not so much to represent as to duplicate, and where praise goes to the transcript rather than to moral interpretation, or even significance" ("The Imitationists" 359). Although the commentary notes that other contemporary critics predominantly focus on the novel's quasi-scientific technique, it de-emphasizes *Manhattan Transfer*'s socio-critical content (i.e., the 'moral interpretation') as well, thereby suggesting that such a reductive reading is appropriate. At the time, the commentary thereby reinforced the trend to overlook *Manhattan Transfer*'s counter-discursive content and to stress the great technical skill of its author.

The same holds true for those reviewers who validated *Manhattan Transfer* by comparing it to popular entertainment formats. Not only Lewis likened the novel's formal arrangement to a vaudeville show and to the "technique of the movie, in its flashes, its cut-backs, its speed" ("Manhattan at Last" 63). In 1926, May Lamberton Becker compared it to "a Pathe news film" (861) and another four years later, Fanny Butcher noted that the novel represents "a technical trick, [...] a panorama of New York composed of rapid flashes, casual, vivid, intense" that is "unquestionably fascinating" (82, 83). A similar description of *Manhattan Transfer* as a "novel of clattering, blazing, reeking New York, presented as if half a dozen films had been snipped into unequal length, pasted hit-or-miss into one, and run off at flickering speed," appeared in the short review in the *Century Magazine* ("[Rev. of *Manhattan*]" 640; cf. Bodenheim, "American" 673). As in Lewis' and Butcher's reviews, references to the novel's counter-discursive content were here limited to such subtle hints as represented by the term 'reeking.'[133]

Even though most of these reviews do not explicitly state it, all of them imply that *Manhattan Transfer* is a novel worth reading because it does not trouble its American readers with a critique but simply caters to their "need" of enjoying a short-lived thrill in the "modern world that has seen more if not felt more than in the past" (Williams, "Basis" 178). In one of a column titled "The Phoenix Nest," which appeared in the *Saturday Review of Literature* on December 5,

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[133] Butcher's only reference to the critical content of the novel appears in the formulation "short impressionistic, *satirical* biographies of great men" (83, emphasis added).

1925, the columnist 'The Phoenician' even explicitly stylizes the novel as a modern text designed to speed up readers' pace of life: The novel "*should* be read" by modern Americans "on subways, in quick lunches, on the stairs of apartment houses, in the Grand Central Station, climbing to the Elevated, on cross-town cars, in taxi-cabs, in express elevators, thridding' the aisles of department stores, etc., etc." (Phoenician 390). Since the act of reading *Manhattan Transfer* could either be completed simultaneously with other accelerant acts (taking a 'quick lunch') or could efficiently fill any vacant time during accelerated transport (i.e., 'the subway' or 'express elevators') with thrilling reading experiences, the columnist suggests, Dos Passos' novel as such is a means to accelerate life's pace: By reading it, time-conscious readers are able to do and experience more in a given period of time. With only a slight hint at the novel's critical dimension in the word 'sordid,' the columnist concludes that *Manhattan Transfer* "is a gorgeous goulash of New York,—to us it *is* New York, as it roars and seethes around us [...]; it is a string of news items informed with the true colors and noises and emotional burble of the living city; it is all the sordidness of the big town bathed in strange glamour" (390).[134]

In this very statement, another noteworthy trend in the critical reception of *Manhattan Transfer* comes into relief: Many reviewers who shortly addressed the novel's critical dimension either critiqued and invalidated it or they simply negated it. The columnist recognizes that the novel portrays the 'sordidness of the big town,' yet he directly undermines the counter-discursive negativity of such a phrase by adding that the overall portrayal offers to the reader a thrilling experience of the 'strange glamor' of the city's diverse inhabitants ('emotional burble') as well as its auditory and visual stimulants ('noises,' 'colors'). Similarly, Lewis mentions at one point in his review that social isolation, perceptual overload, population congestion and moral degradation appear in the novel, yet he instantly adds that "the thing that really distinguishes Dos Passos" as an American modernist "is [...] his passion for the beauty and stir of life – [...] a thousand divinations of beauty. [...] There is no whining here! [...] There is the strong savor of very life" ("Manhattan at Last" 70-72).[135] Having been prompted by Lewis' eulogy to read Dos Passos' novel, 'reader critics' wrote letters back to the *Saturday Review of Literature* to similarly invalidate the critical outlook of *Manhattan Transfer*. Allan G. Harper claimed that Dos Passos' depiction was unjust since "[r]eal people are not exclusively tramps, bootleggers, financial failures, discontented journalists, low politicians, actresses, and wasters – all soaked in sin and intent on adultery. Genuine human beings are neither so completely corroded nor debauched" (486). Ruth Schuyler Cole, another reader who wrote to the editor, agreed with Harper that such a portrayal is "untrue to life in which, even to the most unfortunate, at least a few happy moments do occur" (486).[136] Unlike other critics who simply over-emphasized the formal-aesthetic dimensions of Dos Passos' novel, the columnist, Lewis as well as the two reader critics addressed *Manhattan Transfer*'s critical dimension, yet all of them invalidated or negated it. They highlighted those facets in the novel that were compatible with the emergent conception of American modernism and disclaimed that there existed any legitimate critique in the novel.

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[134] In the February 1930 issue of *New York Herald Tribune Books*, Mary Ross presented a similar evaluation of *1919*, whose technique she describes as another enhancement in the "really amazing economy and precision of word" as well as "the unrolling of one person's moving film of experience" in the Camera Eye sections (100, 101). She declares that she "can still feel beating in my memory its [*Manhattan Transfer*'s] bright, sharp rhythms" – a "hurrying beat" created in a "brave experiment in dynamic fiction" (79) – five years after reading the novel. With no word does Ross mention the critical content of *Manhattan Transfer*. Instead, she describes the novel as "baffling in the almost indiscriminate richness of its texture" and praises the "bombardment of ideas, types, social movements and individual lives" in *The 42nd Parallel.* Ross admires the "range of perception and sympathy" in both works and claims, uncritically, that they mask all their (negative) content: they represent "a search for generalization, as a spectrum whirled on a disk shows solid white" (81). In a similar way, Horace Gregory notes that the "speed at which it [*The Big Money*] travels is a cleansing force, dismissing the 'destructive elements' in our civilization as transitory and unreal" (135).

[135] The novelist and screenwriter Cyril Hume is an exception. In his review of *Manhattan Transfer*, he notes that the portrayal shows a "monstrous, glittering, barbaric, perverse, and [still a city] overwhelmingly glamorous with loveliness" – "evil but compelling with beauty" – yet he also critiques that Dos Passos fails to develop a critical statement on contemporary life: "Mr. Dos Passos has felt but he has failed to express quite intelligibly that awful and mechanical din which harries

As these examples reveal, a remarkable number of actors in the domain of modern American letters praised Dos Passos' novel as an innovative modernist masterpiece, as another advance in textual-technical acceleration, by ignoring its critical dimensions. The active part Dos Passos took in the extrinsic validation of modernists such as Cummings (see above) certainly facilitated this process. The same holds true for Dos Passos' programmatic texts on modern American letters, in which he publicly signaled that he shares Williams' and Moore's ambition to revolutionize notions of creativity, literary form and style according to the value of acceleration – the outcome of which he first presented to the public with *A Pushcart at the Curb*, a volume holding predominantly imagist verse, in 1922. What distinguishes the professional writer in times of "confusion and rapid change," Dos Passos stated in 1935, is his aptitude as a "technician just as much as an electrical engineer" for "discovery, originality, invention" ("Writer" 545). In 1916, he had already appealed to all American actors in the cultural scene (theater, literature, visual arts) to "press on" rather than "stagnate" ("Against" 271). In various essays, Dos Passos proclaimed that it was his goal to bring American letters up to the normalized rate of "visual stimulants" in

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us day and night in the City, merciless, unrhythmic, maddening" (718, 719, 719). Also British reviewers such as Clifford Bower-Shore and D.H. Lawrence asserted that Dos Passos might indeed be "impressed by the wonder of it [life] – and the occasional beauty," yet first and foremost tells "a chronicle of humbug and cruelty, violence and subtle horror" (Bower-Shore 120, 118). Although Lawrence celebrates Dos Passos' modernist techniques of condensation, he describes *Manhattan Transfer* as an "endless series of glimpses of people in the vast scuffle of Manhattan Island [...] in a confusion that has no obvious rhythm, but wherein at last we recognize the systole-diastole of success and failure, the end being all failure" (75; cf. Strong).

[136] See the review by the critic and historian Bernard De Voto as well, who classifies the critical depiction of modern men and women in *The Big Money* as inaccurate: "[R]eally," De Voto contends, Americans "enormously enjoy the business, the bargaining, the sports, the contention, the boisterousness" of urban entertainment: "They laugh a lot. They enjoy themselves. Millionaires and hoboes, strikers and scabs, they are incurable hedonists. They have gusto" (128). Similarly, a front-page article in *Saturday Review of Literature* mentions the socio-critical commentary in *Manhattan Transfer* only to call its accuracy into question: "the broken narrative of Dos Passos's book, its shake-up of figures shivering one against the other, its flashes which make no pattern, is tremendously convincing. This is not perhaps what man is like, but it is the resemblance of a great city" ("Thunder in Manhattan" 489).

modern America ("Grosz" 610; "Is the 'Realistic' Theater" 591). On the basis of these statements and his experimental novel, critics validated Dos Passos as a pioneer of modern American letters. *Manhattan Transfer* was canonized within the domain-specific discourse as a novel that stylistically and formally celebrates speed.

RETROACTIVE SELF-VALIDATION: THE CASE OF GERTRUDE STEIN

While the case of Dos Passos illustrates that even an author through whose work runs a counter-discursive strand was established as a speed-pioneer of letters through reductive acts of extrinsic validation, the case of Stein illustrates that the dynamic of canonization that had emerged within the domain-specific discourse offered an opportunity for returning expatriates willing to, retroactively, dedicate their opus to the cause of acceleration. While 'aberrant' expatriates such as Pound came under attack, the value system upon which the process of validation/canonization was based in the United States enabled Stein to maneuver herself and her work discursively into a position where American author- and reader-critics would grant them extrinsic validation – just as Pathe in the domain of American film (see chapter II.A.2). Stein availed herself of this opportunity at a point in time when her status among European modernists came under attack. In response to a publicity campaign, which had emphasized the readability and entertainment value of Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in 1933 (cf. Galow 320), a number of prominent European modernists published a "Testimony Against Gertrude Stein" in the magazine *transition*. In this testimony, the very 'quality' that Stein's publisher had used to advertise the work comes under attack: her "'baby' style" "invalidates [...] that Miss Stein was in any way concerned with the shaping of the epoch" (Braque et al. 13, 2). Stein's sudden return to American soil after thirty-one years and especially her decision to deliver a number of lectures, which were published as *Lectures in America* and *Four Lectures* in 1935, presents itself as an offensive of retroactive self-canonization. This is the case because Stein seems to have adopted the rhetoric of acceleration in her lectures to win over her American audience.

Certainly, reviewers had admired the temporal quality of Stein's "masterpieces in condensation" long before she embarked on the lecture tour (Jolas/Paul 175).[137] Now, however, Stein apparently tailored her lectures to the purpose of self-validation: Repeatedly, she emphasizes in her *Lectures* that she is American and writes a "twentieth-century literature" that grows out of the American soil and is, unlike 'English' writing, oriented towards the twentieth rather than the nineteenth century (*Lectures* 9, cf. 32, 45-47, 160; *Narration* 19). Just as Williams, she claims that her work's temporal quality is rooted in the American idiom, which she considers naturally efficient and geared to produce a strong impact:

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[137] For critics who recognized this quality in her work between 1910 and 1933, see Burke, "Engineering With Words;" Dodge; "Three Lives;" Troy; van Vechten. Wyndham Lewis noted in 1927 that "*Time* is at the bottom of her mind, the treasured key to her technical experiments" (*Time* 54). In the lecture "Composition as Explanation," one of Stein's few public explications in the 1920s, she defines the modern quality of her texts by saying that "everything is the same except composition and time, composition and the time *of* the composition and the time *in* the composition" (23).

> The American not living every minute of every day in a daily way does not make what he has to say to be soothing he wants what he has to say to be exciting, and to move as everything moves, [...] to move as anything that really moves is moving. (*Narration* 6)[138]

Stylizing her experiments as scientific inquiries into the mechanics of acceleration, Stein suggested that it was her central objective to (re)synchronize American letters with other speed technologies: "[M]y ultimate business as an artist was not with where the car goes as it goes but with the movement inside that is of the essence of its going" (*Lectures* 195). "[W]riting anything directly" in an "exact and concentrated and sober" manner, however, is not the only technique that Stein recommends in her *Lectures* to increase poetic speed (24, 198). She uses a comparison to the film projector to promote her technique of insistence as an accelerant one: Just as photographic stills that were re-animated to quasi-*durée* when set "continuously moving" by the projector, the "emphasis" in her texts, Stein claimed, is always "different [...] to make it all be moving" (*Lectures* 176, 179).[139] Such retroactive proclamations served Stein to invite the readers of her lectures to re-read *Tender Buttons* (1914), her portraits in *Geography and Plays* (1922) or *The Making of Americans* (1925) and to acclaim them retroactively as American modernist texts. Perhaps, Williams' eulogy "The Work of Gertrude Stein" had made it plain to Stein in 1931 how great was the potential for such a retroactive validation: In it, Williams recognizes their joint "search for truth and beauty" in "[m]ovement" and in the "breakdown of the attention." He moreover identifies the "swift and accurate pursuit of the modern imperative" in Stein's work and compares the words in her poems to "a crowd at Coney Island" (177, 117, 116, 119).[140]

DISCOURSES, ACTORS AND IMPERATIVES DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF ACCELERATION

In 1945, the critic Randall Jarrell noted that not only Williams' experimental texts but "[e]ven his good critical remarks sound[ed] as if they had been made by Henry Ford" ("[On the America]" 170). During the first wave of acceleration, this comparison was all but incidental. Pioneers in the domain of early film, leaders of the City Practical movement, aspiring businessmen as well as self- and time-conscious American avant-gardists strategically established speed-up, constant innovation and scientificity as new norms and imperatives in their own fields to validate themselves and their respective practice in modern America, where speed-up had become a new value and American pioneering had been reconfigured as a temporal endeavor.

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[138] In another lecture, Stein observes that "the non-daily life living" of the American people, thriving to heightened rates of change and higher paces of life, has not only effected "a different movement in them" but "has forced the words to have a different feeling of moving" that registers in ads, newspapers and language (*Narration* 9, 8, 9, cf. 14).

[139] For an exploration of the link between Stein's aesthetic and film, see Susan McCabe's essay "'Delight in Dislocation'."

[140] See "The Modern Primer," where Williams writes about a two-fold speed-up in Stein's technique (mental movement and innovation): "the mind [is] being liberated in new ways" (18).

These ambitious actors prompted others in their fields to devise ever new techniques to accelerate their practices and 'products' as well. As they began to adjust their own acts and their value judgments accordingly, thereby forging domain-specific discourses of acceleration, they set dynamic of acceleration into motion on the level of discourse. As a result, acceleration emerged as a central feature in the rhetoric of these diverse actors as well as in their practices and products.

The examination of literary and non-literary texts in the chapter on American literary modernism has demonstrated that not only "the proliferation of manifestos in the early years of this [twentieth] century," as Johanna E. Vondeling suggests, but also author-critics' strategy of circulating a whole variety of texts in their little magazines and beyond helped "circumscribe[] the credentials by which an artist's prestige could be evaluated and regulated" (Vondeling 128). It was not simply that "speed [somehow] infiltrated modernism," as Enda Duffy claims (10). A group of self- and time-conscious avant-gardists programmatically established the movement as a form of speed-pioneering to ensure its persistence in modern America.

This chapter has furthermore illuminated the considerable impact that the domain-specific discourse of acceleration, as it emerged in the field of American avant-garde literature, had on the consolidation of American literary modernism as a discursive construct. Author-critics' programmatic acts of self-canonization and mutual validation/regulation in (and sometimes beyond) their magazines established American literary modernism as a practice that is unequivocally dedicated to acceleration, constant innovation and scientific accuracy – a seemingly a-political, ideologically aligned movement that adapts modern American letters to the new temporal regime of the twentieth century. In a second phase of consolidation, early literary critics ambitious to canonize the practice reinforced this very conception through acts of extrinsic validation that de-emphasized (or even ignored) counter-discursive elements in works that otherwise complied with the distinctive criteria of American literary modernism. Even though such a conception of the practice is reductive and, in many cases, does not do justice to the works by authors such as Williams or Dos Passos, it became prevalent within the domain-specific discourse at the time. Contemporary interventions in favor of a more openly critical and solution-oriented modernism confirm this: The literary critic and New Humanist Irving Babbitt, for instance, felt the need to urge in 1928 that "unless some solution is reached by a full and free exercise of the critical spirit, one remains a mere modernist and not a thoroughgoing and complete modern; for the modern spirit and the critical spirit are in their essence one" (165–66).[141] In the April 1917 issue of *Seven Arts*, Frank's associate Van Wyck Brooks had already attacked authors publishing in "contemporary 'high-class' magazines" for employing an aesthetic that is "putting us in extreme good conceit with ourselves while actually doing nothing either to liberate our minds or to enlighten us as to the real nature of our civilization" ("Culture" 658).[142]

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[141] Similarly, the Marxist Granville Hicks stated that Dos Passos "had achieved much [in *Manhattan Transfer*, yet] he had not achieved enough: the book suggests the complexity of city life, [...] it leaves us with a sense of the drift of men and

In the 1920s, a number of unrelated American experimental writers were gaining the impression that the negative effects of ubiquitous acceleration were drowned out by a collective, somewhat illusory national chorus in favor of speed-up – even in responses to slapstick comedies that featured a car crash or in reviews of the leftist novel *Manhattan Transfer*. As the following three case studies will reveal, these writers claimed independently from one another that if established American modernists were including a critique in their work, it was not prominent and deep-reaching enough to constitute a counter-discursive voice within the overarching discourse of acceleration. Some of them even openly stated that a complete adaptation of literary style and form to the new value of acceleration compromises American letters' ability to communicate a critique in the first place. During the 1920s, the decade in which "modernism had achieved a critical legitimacy and a cultural authority" (C. Turner 7), these authors independently set out to write experimental novels that could not simply be 'appropriated' by critics and would thus, ideally, have a generative effect: they would critically address the short- and long-term repercussions of ubiquitous acceleration, disillusion modern American readers and animate them to think productively about alternatives to the hyper-accelerated lives some of them were leading.

The three case studies in the second part of this study unearth how Nathan Asch, Mary Borden and Waldo Frank did not choose the path of writing themselves into the American literary avant-garde through discursive acts, as Stein did. Instead, they established themselves as authors of a different kind. The case studies moreover examine the re-readings of contemporary city layouts, business practices and entertainment culture, which these authors offered in their novels for the purpose of restoring American letters' allegedly lost socio-critical agency, for moving the negative side-effects of acceleration back into focus and for circulating their alternate visions of modern life.

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events, but it does not indicate the direction of the drift" (*Great* 288). Moses Harper added in *The New Republic* that "[l]ocked in this collection are doubtless meanings which the author has failed to bring to life. And so *Manhattan Transfer* reminds one of a Sears Roebuck catalogue" ("[Rev. of *Manhattan*]" 119).

[142] The British critic F.R. Leavis similarly critiqued that Dos Passos' "work does not offer an adequate realization of the issues it offers to deal with," namely "the results of disintegration and decay." Dos Passos offers only vague hints, yet no action-oriented propositions "concerning the way in which meaning is to be restored to the agonized vacuity" he conveys (177, 177, 178). Leavis quotes the following passages from *Manhattan Transfer* and *The Forty-Second Parallel:* "There'd be gaiety for the workers then, after the revolution;" "quiet men who wanted a house with a porch to putter around, and a fat wife to cook for them, a few drinks and cigars, and a garden to dig in" (177).

PART II

WRITING AGAINST THE DISCOURSE OF ACCELERATION: AVANT-GARDE WRITERS OF A DIFFERENT KIND AND THEIR ALTERNATE PRACTICE

III WRITING AGAINST THE DISCOURSE OF ACCELERATION IN THE 1920S

> THE man who builds a factory builds a temple; the man who works there, worships there; and to each is due, not scorn or blame, but reverence and praise.
>
> Calvin Coolidge, 1916[143]

In his 1916 address to the Amherst Alumni Association, from which this quote is taken, the future President of the United States Calvin Coolidge uses a religious analogy to underline that it is not only morally right but also part of Americans' civic duty to honor and praise those of their compatriots who contribute to the nation' progress in the new century, for instance by establishing a modern factory or by working most efficiently within one. Using the phrase 'not scorn and blame,' Coolidge acknowledges that critical assessments of such speed-pioneering have emerged in the country, yet he dismisses these as unpatriotic and inappropriate. The second part of this study focuses on an unacknowledged counter-discursive practice of this kind, which emerged in the domain of American avant-garde letters in the 1920s and was reproved by actors in this very domain in similar ways. In this practice, which registers in the novels published by writers such as Nathan Asch, Mary Borden and Waldo Frank, an aesthetic of in-betweenness and a critical assessment of fast urban life is employed to sensitize readers to the detrimental effects of ubiquitous speed, to present them with viable alternatives and, finally to animate them to challenge the norms and imperatives that Coolidge and many others propagated at the time.

The following three case studies will demonstrate that Asch, Borden and Frank might be counted among those who Coolidge addressed in 1916. In spite of their differences, all three were dedicated, in their life and work, to a critical renegotiation of the norms and imperatives that Coolidge emphasizes: time-economy, constant innovation and a scientific approach. In their novels, they chose to renegotiate the practices discussed in the first part of this study to sensitize readers to the downside of acceleration and to revalidate forms of slowness in twentieth-century America. In the August 1926 issue of the ultra-leftist magazine *New Masses*, Frank even published a commentary in which he directly attacks Coolidge because, he claims, the president is "false in spirit" since he is "stripped to the model of the machine" and is "approved by a smug world" ("Two" 45, 48, 48).[144] Such statements illustrate Frank's confrontational attitude. Neither Asch nor Borden ever adopted as aggressive a tone as Frank, yet they, too, reprehended that acceleration had become the ultimate norm and imperative in modern America. When writing their 1920s' novels, for instance, all of them independently chose to address the deleterious effects of this condition on city dwellers and to conspicuously diverge from what was just being established as the canonical practice of modernist writing in America.[145] The reason was, it seems, that each of them was trying to devise an experimental prose that would convey a critical diagnosis and create awareness, present alternatives as well as trigger activity and change.

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[143] This often-quoted statement is taken from Bruce Barton's essay "The Silent Man on Beacon Hill: An Appreciation of Calvin Coolidge," which first appeared in the March 1920 issue of *Woman's Home Companion* (11-12).

[144] Compare the assault on the newly-inaugurated President Herbert Hoover, the "symbol of Business, Efficiency, Prohibition, Protestantism," which Jean Toomer wrote in 1929, yet never published ("American Letter" 139).

The clear-cut divisions between the alternate and the canonical practice implied in these preliminary comments are, of course, not be mistaken as empirical facts. Rather, they describe an opposition that was discursively established by writers such as Asch, Borden and Frank themselves, as the first section in each case study will reveal. Although there existed counter-discursive dimensions in texts that were acclaimed as modern, American and fast within the domain-specific discourse at the time, each of these three writers tended to draw a clear line between his or her own stance/practice and the one that (author-)critics were marking as canonical at the time. Thereby, each of them established him or herself as an experimental writer of a different kind within the domain-specific discourse of acceleration, even if this, at times, led them to overgeneralize: Frank, for instance, disregards counter-discursive dimensions that exist in William Carlos Williams' texts when he dissociates his own novels from them (see chapter III.A.1). The discursive construct of American literary modernism as an a-political, ideologically aligned movement dedicated to acceleration provided the contrastive foil against which the three writers discussed in this study set their agenda and practice in the 1920s, respectively.

Meanwhile, however, Asch, Borden and Frank each sympathized with a number of avant-gardists who, too, seemed to value 'the slow' (for instance, in their focus on rural areas) and who opted for a different aesthetic and objective than Williams, Marianne Moore or E.E. Cummings appeared to do at the time.[146] Jean Toomer and Sherwood Anderson are two prominent examples. Although Toomer's prose, for instance his 1923 novel *Cane*, differs thematically from *City Block, The Office* and *Flamingo* because it is primarily invested in questions of ethnic identity, history and racism[147] rather than in a critique of accelerated city life as such,[148] Waldo Frank openly addressed the similarities he saw between his own and Toomer's, as well as Anderson's, ideological stance and aesthetic.

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[145] As I detail in the three case studies, 'conspicuous divergence' means that Asch, Borden and Frank employ relatively established modernist techniques, thereby calling up the discourse of acceleration, only to depart from them for the purpose of disillusionment and critique.

[146] Asch's relation to Ernest Hemingway and Borden's association with Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis will be addressed in the respective case studies. In the analysis of *City Block, The Office* and *Flamingo*, I will occasionally draw comparisons to the style and thematic focus of 'other' modernisms to indicate similarities. I will keep these comparisons to a minimum, however, to avoid deviating from the main objective, which is the in-depth scrutiny of the alternate practice.

[147] See specially the stories "Portrait in Georgia," which describes how a woman's hair is "braided chestnut, / coiled like a lyncher's rope" (38), and "Blood-Burning Moon" in *Cane*.

[148] See Bone 196; Braithwaite; S. A. Brown; Byrd/Gates Jr. 208; Du Bois/Locke; Helbling; Matthews 295–296; Sollors; Stephens; Woodson; Yellin.

In *Our America*, a book-length study of American history and culture (1919), for instance, Frank claims that there exists a "new seeking consciousness" (139) in Anderson's work and he extolls the writer's decision to depart from "the traveled American road of money-making" he had taken as a Chicago advertising solicitor and as a manager of a paint factory in Elyria, Ohio. Frank admires the "un-American mood," with which Anderson challenged the value of "narrow[ing] down the rich processes of one's mind to the monomania of acquisition" (137–38).[149] In this respect, Anderson's stance resembled his own. Anderson's prose, Frank asserts in equally favorable terms, is a "[p]rophecy for the American world" because, with resistant heroes such as Sam McPherson (*Windy McPherson's Son* [1916]) and Beaut McGregor (*Marching Men* [1917]), it not only chronicles individuals' gradual disillusionment with life and work in the industrial age. Moreover, it represents "a consciousness of life and love which must create for us the America of our to-morrow" as well as an "impalpable marriage of substance and of human spirit" (141, 142, 143; cf. "Emerging" 74, 77-78).[150] The combination of the critique Anderson occasionally formulated and the 'spiritual' vision he at times drafted in his literary and non-literary texts at the time, it seems, made him worthy of praise in Frank's eyes.[151]

In his 1916 review of *Windy McPherson's Son*, however, Frank qualified his laudation, asserting that Anderson's novel "is not a prophetic work. Its author is simply a man who has felt the moving passions of his people, yet sustained himself against them just enough in a crude way to set them forth" ("Emerging" 74). In this review, Frank addresses the alleged shortcomings of Anderson's novel as follows: "For a feel of the America of tomorrow, do not look to this book," Frank advises and cuttingly remarks that Anderson's novel terminates the protagonist's "dynamic" search in its second part, where Sam reunites with his wife, who "like some diluted Penelope, has been awaiting his return in a villa on the Hudson" ("Emerging" 76). To Frank, such a return to married life in rural America "slams the door on the vista of passionate inquiry" into alternative, modern modes of life, thereby "dimm[ing] all the voluptuous speculation which flushes the novel as a sunrise transfigures a plain" ("Emerging" 77). There is a critique and a search for alternatives in *Windy McPherson's Son* that Frank applauds, yet his ultimate verdict is that Anderson neither offers a clear vision of an alternate existence nor a route toward change. In his foreword to Toomer's *Cane*, Frank similarly emphasizes his spiritual allegiance with the author, yet proclaims that he is both more critical and more action-oriented in his work than Toomer.[152] Just as Anderson's novels, *Cane* fails to formulate a general critique of the human condition in the modern age as well as possible remedies, Frank claims.[153] The author attributes this 'weakness' to the fact that Toomer was exploring his ethnic heritage with *Cane*, and was, thus, too uncritical when he wrote the novel: "For Toomer," Frank concludes, "the Southland is not a problem to be solved; it is a field of loveliness to be sung" (117).[154]

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[149] In 1931, Anderson himself satirically noted that the common reaction to problems of modern American life "is very simple. Say times are good. Say anyone who declares times are not good is un-American" (*Perhaps* 70). Although Frank and Anderson used the term 'un-American' differently, the critical attitude it describes appealed to both of them.

[150] In *Perhaps Women*, Anderson writes that "[t]here will have to be a new religion, more pagan, something more closely connected with fields and rivers. There will have to be built up a new and stronger sympathy between man and man. We may find the new mystery there" (57–58).

[151] See for instance the short stories collected in *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), *Horses and Men* (1923) and *A New Testament* (1927) as well as essays such as "New Orleans" or "Lift up Thine Eyes." In *Perhaps Women* (1931), Anderson discusses possibilities of "*sav*[ing] *man from the dominance of the machine*" (7). In 1932, Edwin Seaver remarked that "some of the stories in *City Block* seem to resemble stories in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, however much the two books may differ in execution." In both of them, "America was being given a brand-new soul" (248).

There exist parallels between the writers and novels examined in the following case studies and the stances that Anderson and Toomer took in their novels and beyond: a critical attitude towards modern city life and the vision of an existence that includes both a "moral rebirth" and social reunification (Burbank 52). The fact that neither Anderson nor Toomer tailored their prose in the 1920s to the purpose of presenting an alternative, yet modern lifestyle, however, distinguishes them from writers such as Frank, Asch and Borden, who each performed a search for coping strategies in their novels. Toomer's *Cane* seems more specifically focused and less action-oriented and Anderson's novels appear somewhat reactionary: they are rooted in "cultural primitivism, the conviction that life lived close to nature" (Burbank 55) is the ideal to which modern Americans need to return.[155]

Anderson's occasional public endorsement of modernist aesthetics, his alliance with authors such as Gertrude Stein and the extrinsic validation he received within the domain-specific discourse of acceleration represent additional points of distinction. While neither Asch or Borden, nor Frank ever strove to receive praise from the self- and time-conscious promoters of American modernism, Anderson sporadically expressed his fascination with machine technology[156] and endorsed Hemingway's clipped quasi-journalistic prose[157] as well as Gertrude Stein's experiments.[158] Drawing on the repertoire of value criteria used by literary critics to consolidate American literary modernism at the time (scientific approach, innovation), he stylized himself as a recognized member of the modern movement in American arts in 1925, who is entitled to "speak to you on the subject of modern American writing." As a representative of this movement, Anderson declares in this programmatic text *The Modern Writer*, he is "working more intensely in more complex and delicate materials" than writers of popular literature and is "get[ting] back into his own hands some control over the tools and materials of his craft" (25, 3, 31, 31–32).[159] In his preface to Stein's *Geography and Plays*, Anderson similarly signals that he knows what it takes to be noticed in the critical discourse on American modernism: "a strange freakish performance" helped Stein to "attract attention to herself [...] in our hurried, harried lives," he claims. Associating himself with other writers eager to find new techniques of fast writing, Anderson continues: "We writers are, you see, all in such a hurry. There are such grand things we must do" (1, 2). Also Toomer, at times, staged similar acts of self-validation, for instance when he wrote an "Open Letter" to Gorham B. Munson, the prominent critic of American modernism, in 1923, in which he celebrates a "national art" that is marked by "a concentration on America, the acceptance of the machine, the attitude [...] which uses modern forms, and not the hurt caused by them" (8).

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[152] See the first paragraph in Frank's foreword to *Cane* ("Foreword;" cf. "To Jean"). See Montgomery Gregory's 1923 review, too, in which he claims that "[v]erse, fiction, and drama are fused into a spiritual unity" (179). In 1923, Toomer wrote to Frank: "you are *in* it [*Cane*], specifically here and there, mystically because of the spiritual bond there is between us" ("To Waldo" 165). Influenced by the mystical philosopher Georges I. Gurdjieff, Toomer later wrote a number of pieces that critiqued the mechanization of modern life, yet these were published only in Frederik L. Rusch's *Jean Toomer Reader* in 1993. See Toomer's play "The Sacred Factory" (1927), unpublished (and unproduced) until Darwin Turner included it in *The Wayward and the Seeking* in 1980. In the play, Toomer presents the awakening of Mary, one of the central characters, to an alternate vision of 'modern being' that conjoins the positive elements of the modern intellect (a "knowledge of the actual world, a world in which facts must be seen and events understood") and of a more traditional "sense and faith in the world of possibilities, a world intangible to senses and even perhaps to intellect, but to faith, real" (386).

[153] In contrast, Rudolph P. Byrd and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. claim in their afterword to *Cane* that the novel is about "fragmentation, or duality, [which] is the very condition of modernity [...], and this theme is repeated in each of its sections, whether in the South or in the North, whether in the country or the city" (226).

[154] See the review by Gorham B. Munson, who identifies Toomer as an uncritical "spectatorial artist" who finds African-American life "to be potent and sweet, colorful and singing, interesting and puzzling, pathetic and worthy of respect; he is able to accept it." As elsewhere, Munson focuses on the writer's "skill as a literary craftsman" rather than the work's critical content (lynching in "Blood-Burning Moon;" urban life in "Box Seat") ("Significance" 187, 187, 185).

[155] In *Perhaps Women* (1931), Anderson admits that "all my efforts had been efforts to escape" from the world he had oftentimes critiqued, where "speed took the place of purpose" (112). The volume reveals Anderson's attempt to enrich his critique with a productive, visionary dimension and his hope "*that it may* [at least] *arouse thought and discussion*" (7). In his illustrated Depression travelogue *Home Town,* Anderson applauds the "movement back to towns" that followed "the growth of unemployment in the big industrial cities" (140).

Within the domain-specific discourse of acceleration, such comments functioned as acts of self-validation, suggesting to actors in the field that both Anderson's and Toomer's work, at least partly, qualified as modern American literature. Accordingly, both writers were occasionally, yet quite reductively, acclaimed within the field: Even though Toomer's *Cane* is clearly "an ambivalent book that describes modernity with both exuberance and melancholy," especially in its portrayal of African-American life in the metropolis in part two (Sollors 103), Munson celebrated *Cane*'s modernist aesthetic (stream of consciousness, Imagism, etc.),[160] its use of "swift and clipped [speech] for violent narrative action" and the recognizable "skill [of the author] as a literary craftsman" in 1925 ("Significance" 185). Stein responded to Anderson's advances toward her in a similarly reductive manner. In one of her *Four Lectures*, she counts him among the American writers in whose texts "words are left alone more and more feel that they are moving and all of it is detached and is detaching anything from anything" (*Narration* 10; cf. *Autobiography* 213).[161] In a note that appeared in the January 1917 issue of *The Little Review*, the reader critic Daphne Carr praises Anderson's *Windy McPherson's Son* for being "a-quiver with that life whose pulsing reality we are forever eager to touch, to know." In style, Carr claims, the novel is "reflecting the immense movements of the life about him" and she concludes by clarifying most enthusiastically that Anderson thus re-synchronizes modern American writing with the pace of 'fast' modern media: "Yes, he is cinematographic" (28). Notably, a response by Margaret Anderson, printed directly below Carr's fervent validation, authorizes this reading with a comparison to popular film formats of the transitional era: "I [...] wondered what was the matter with you until I came upon 'He is cinematographic.' Then I saw you knew what you were talking about [...] it's as good as a Griffith show" ("[*Windy*]" 29).

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[156] Although Anderson claims that "for the present, at least, it [the machine] is too big, too efficient" in *Perhaps Women*, he writes that "they are beautiful. In motion they become gorgeous things. I have stood sometimes for two or three hours in some big factory looking at the machines in motion" (45).

[157] Although Hemingway's "efficient style [...] was not developed in self-conscious empathy with the mentality of the engineer," as Cecelia Tichi claims, this very style as well as the machine metaphors Hemingway occasionally used (*Shifting* 219) made him 'compatible' with the emergent conception of American modernism. Williams recognized that "[m]uch of Hemingway's work is based on the qualities Stein has separated out in pure form" ("Modern" 18) and other American critics praised Hemingway's technical skill in producing "dry compressed little vignettes" during the 1920s (E. Wilson, "[Rev. of *Three Stories*]"). See footnote 227 in chapter III.B.1. In *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), Hemingway himself famously claims: "If a writer knows enough about what he is writing he may omit things [...]. The dignity of the movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water" (qtd. in Rodenberg 30).

[158] See for instance his description of Stein's influence on him in *A Story Teller's Story* (362).

[159] In *The Story Teller's Story*, he pronounces that "there would be a great deal of consolation to me in being at least a modern," if not successful (363).

[160] Toomer himself wrote that the Imagists' "insistence on fresh vision and on the perfect clean economical line was just what I had been looking for. [...] I had in my hands the tools for my own creation" ("Cane Years" 120).

In contrast to Anderson and Toomer, the writers examined in this study sought to inhibit such reductive readings and comparisons from the start by devising a hybrid aesthetic and by staging discursive acts of 'self-distancing.' As the case studies will demonstrate, they dissociated themselves from a modernist practice that seemed to them immersed in the ideology of the overarching discourse of acceleration in their critical texts. Moreover, they devised an aesthetic of in-betweenness that both references and diverges from fast textual forms in order to sensitize readers to the detrimental effects of hyper-accelerated city life. Their self-perception as authors of a different kind, as Frank's comments reveal, relied heavily upon the contention that they re-negotiated imperatives of the day to develop alternate visions of modern American life that were not merely oppositional, backward-looking or escapist in nature: They envisioned ways of productively re-integrating slow and old elements in fast, modern lives.

The acts of self-validation and extrinsic validation quoted above demonstrate that various contemporary actors of the day were involved in mapping out a complex constellation of literary modernisms in early twentieth-century America. Although the modernisms of Williams, Toomer, Anderson and Frank, for instance, were not mutually exclusive, all of these actors used discursive acts of validation/association and reproof/dissociation to delineate their own and others' position on the map of modern American literature. They did so according to such parameters as their works' aesthetic quality (experimental?; 'fast?'), their ideological stance and thematic focus (in favor of the new and fast?) as well as their works' designated function (recording vs. promoting change). As the following case studies will reveal, the stances that Asch, Borden and Frank independently established for themselves and their work resemble one another. Although they never formed a school or movement of their own, the ways in which these writers positioned themselves within the overarching discourse of acceleration and the practice for which they all autonomously opted during the 1920s invites a retrospective categorization of their novels as exemplars of an unacknowledged practice of American experimental writing that constituted an alternative to the practice deemed canonical at the time. This alternate practice is marked by a pronounced skepticism towards the discourse of acceleration and the (literary) practices that seemed utterly immersed within it. The experimental writers who independently opted for this practice during the 1920s each felt that it was neither possible to express an honest (i.e., critical) and generative assessment of modern American life in texts that appear completely adapted to the new norm of acceleration. Following the notion that "formal innovation was only viable if it could be adapted to engage with urgent social and political concerns," which informed post-war modernisms in Europe (Davison 83), each of them opted for an aesthetic of in-betweenness that combines 'old' and 'new,' thus deviated from the practice that was just established as American literary modernism. Such an aesthetic, each of them imagined, would have a generative effect: It would not only awaken readers to the delusive nature of the discourse of acceleration and sensitize them to the detrimental effects of ubiquitous acceleration. It would present readers with feasible alternatives as well, animating them to take action without categorically negating that efficiency, time-economy, innovation and scientificity are necessary for American progress. A generative agenda, entailing critical diagnosis, critique, generative optimism and reader activation, distinguishes this practice of modern American prose writing.

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[161] See H. L. Mencken's celebration of *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) in the August 1919 issue of *Smart Set* as well. From among a number of current "Novels, Chiefly Bad," he singles out *Winesburg, Ohio* as a "representation so vivid, so full of insight, so shiningly life-like and glowing, that the book is lifted into a category all its own. Nothing quite like it has ever been done in America. It is a book that, at one stroke, turns depression into enthusiasm" (140). At the heyday of American modernism, Anderson was published in such magazines as *Poetry* and the *Little Review*, where self- and time-conscious author-critics were just consolidating the practice. He was awarded the Dial award in 1921 for his achievements in revolutionizing the American short story.

The following case studies take a two-fold approach: In their first part, each case study scrutinizes how the respective writer positioned him- or herself within the literary field through critical essays, literary texts and real-life actions. To examine the effect of these acts within the domain-specific discourse of acceleration, contemporary responses from within the literary field will be reviewed. The second part of each case study is dedicated to literary close analysis. Here, it will become clear that *City Block*, *The Office* and *Flamingo* are unique works of literature, yet there exist correspondences in their style and form as well as in their rendering of the phenomenon of acceleration. These correspondences mark these three novels as exemplars of an alternate practice of modern American writing, which emerged in experimental prose about metropolitan life in the 1920s.

III.A WALDO FRANK AND *CITY BLOCK* (1922): A SPIRITUAL VISION OF AN ALTERNATE LIFE AND LITERATURE

> Writing, in a land like mine, and in our cultural chaos, is worthy only when it is regarded by the author as a mission – as an act of Faith and as an act of construction. [...] You will see, then, that there is a certain cleavage between me and most of my 'confrères.' I have personally nothing against them. But since their work, for the most part, is millinery and the concoction of candies, their self-importance is wearying. [...] My purpose in writing is to create an organic act in this crucial period of the life of a country [...]. What that act is, my work must tell.
>
> Waldo Frank. "Statements of Belief," 1928 (26)

In *The Bookman*'s September 1928 issue, this statement of belief by Waldo Frank appeared next to statements by John Dos Passos and William Carlos Williams. In it, the American writer and cultural critic self-confidently claims that his own approach to modern writing is more 'worthy' than the one practiced by his 'confrères' Dos Passos or Williams. Their artistic work, Frank asserts, resembles the fabrication and selling of commercial products which appeal easily and satisfy quickly ('millinery,' 'candies'). Frank criticizes these writers for adapting their practice to the norms and imperatives of the modern age instead of pursuing generative, 'organic' acts of 'Faith' and 'construction' through it, as he allegedly does. With this in mind, Frank denounces the manner in which Williams and Dos Passos promote themselves and their experiments with words as disproportionate and arrogant.

With his statement, Frank greatly oversimplifies matters. He establishes an opposition between his own and his 'confrère's' aesthetic work that is not as absolute as he proposes. Like many early reviewers of his day, he overemphasizes the formal-aesthetic features of canonical texts and plays down the 'other' (i.e., critical, traditional) dimensions in the works by acclaimed avant-gardists such as Dos Passos and Williams. The separatist sentiment and the self-confidence of the quoted statement meanwhile indicate that Frank was laying claim to a prominent position in the avant-garde of modern American writing. However, the approach he promotes in the statement disqualified him for this position because it clashed with the norms and imperatives that were just proliferating in the domain of modern American letters and beyond, as outlined in the first part of this study. Driven by a generative agenda, Frank nevertheless opted for an alternate practice at the heyday of modernism that, he hoped, would expose the problems he saw in an accelerated world and present readers with strategies to 'manage' modernity. Frank was determined to make modernity both 'writable' and livable, as I will elucidate in this chapter.

Before I examine *City Block* (1922), the forgotten novel in which Frank first implemented the approach he describes in the statement above, the first part of this chapter will contextualize Frank's status in the American avant-garde – the peculiar marginal status on which Louis

Mumford comments in his 1973 introduction to Frank's *Memoirs* as well: "How is it [...] that such an abundantly endowed personality, such a well-seasoned mind, [...] such an active participant in the intellectual and political turmoil of our times, should have left on his own generation such a faint and often distorted impression of his genuine talents?" (xvi-xvii). For this purpose, I will demonstrate that Frank used an exceptionally large number of critical essays and novels to position himself as a writer of a different sort within the domain of avant-garde letters and I will reveal that these texts were critically received at the time. The boastful and often inconclusive manner[162] and, above all, the radical counter-discursive way in which Frank opposed generally accepted truths and values in his texts and presented unwonted visions of modern American life and letters, disqualified them as key-texts of American cultural criticism/literature of the day – at least for the majority of early critics. At the same time, these texts disqualified Frank as a prominent American writer and critic of his time even though he acted as strategically within the domain-specific discourse of acceleration as Williams or Marianne Moore.

The information on Frank's vision that will be introduced in the first part of this chapter provides the foundation for its second part. Here, I examine the city novel in which Frank, the "seeker of new forms of resolution" (Trachtenberg x), first actualized his critique and his vision. As my reading will demonstrate, *City Block*'s formal, stylistic and thematic composition discloses that a generative agenda informs its conception: The novel appears perfectly adapted to the purpose of conveying a critical diagnosis of individual and social life in the American metropolis that, in turn, sensitizes the reader to the detrimental effects of living at a high pace in a hyper-accelerated environment. Moreover, it negotiates the phenomenon of acceleration in nuanced ways in order to recommend strategies of attenuation and coping which may transmute modern life into a more wholesome and more gratifying form. Specific formal and stylistic as well as narrative mechanisms are employed in *City Block* for the purpose of animating readers to adopt these strategies for themselves as well.

III.A.1 SELF-DISTANCING AND A SPIRITUAL VISION: WALDO FRANK'S POSITION AS A CULTURAL CRITIC AND AUTHOR

It took Frank decades to develop his religious vision and his alternate aesthetic, yet he refused to be guided by the imperative of acceleration from an early age on – at least this was what he later claimed: "From the start I elected to be of the minority who chose *not* to run for the *right* goals," he for instance claims in his *Memoirs*, thus distinguishing himself from other, allegedly conformist actors of the day even in retrospect (39). Since 1925, Frank regularly addressed the ways in which he was defending his freedom to refuse to 'run for the right goals' in his non-literary texts. In the essay "I Discover the New World," for instance, he suggests that his resistant behavior originated from the early exposure to European intellectual culture (Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Tennyson, Balzac) at his Upper West Side home, which was to him a "sanctuary" from the hyper-stimulating environment of New York, in which he grew up (3).[163] In his *Memoirs*, Frank furthermore attributes great importance to his extended stays in France, Switzerland and Germany prior to his college years, when his refusal to compete in the American race for recognition and his reluctance to return to his native country incurred disciplinary reproach. Frank relates how his older brother ordered him to attend Yale University (instead of Heidelberg) so that he would finally adapt himself to the norms of his native country: to live efficiently and, above all, develop a patriotic confidence in American modernity. "You've got to be trained to live in America. You're not a European. You're remote enough as it is from your own country. [...] I want you to go to a college which believes in America," Frank remembers his brother saying (29–30). College life at Yale, however, stunted neither the growth of Frank's critical outlook nor his unadapted way of acting. During his senior year, Frank used his position as a drama critic for the New Haven *Courier* to publish a sequence of texts in which he publicly disputes the heroic tales of American progress (in the arts and elsewhere): "I wrote [...], losing no occasion to bewray America's woeful 'lack of culture'," Frank contends in a 1925 essay ("I Discover" 8). During his subsequent position at the *Post* and the *Times*, the daily confrontation with the downside of life in the metropolis further disillusioned him.

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[162] Mockingly, Edward Dahlberg noted in retrospect that one of the things that "destroyed Frank as a writer" was "the grossest vanity" which he showed when, for instance, he told Sherwood Anderson that "the world's greatest writers were Joyce, Anderson, and Waldo Frank" (227–28).

In 1912, this apparently drove Frank from American soil, back towards his imagined "Paradise [...] across the sea" ("I Discover" 9): Europe. During his eight-month stay, he soon realized that his own position as a social critic and modern fiction writer was to lie in-between the two extreme attitudes he saw predominate in Americans at home and abroad, respectively: in-between the expatriates' utter aversion to anything American, which he observed in Europe,[164] and his 'confrère's' seemingly wholehearted embrace of acceleration in America. Here, as Frank remarked critically in the 1920s, the gospel of "'speed' … 'efficiency' … 'mechanical production'" resounded everywhere while "elevated trains pound past and the arrogant motors shuffle and the crowds press [...] in their weary quest for money" ("Savage" 19; "I Discover" 9, 11).

John R. Willingham, one of the few critics who acknowledged Frank's work during the author's lifetime, was certainly right to claim in 1958 that Frank "customarily avoided anything approaching wholehearted acceptance" in America (467). The author's critical self-distancing was, however, never incommensurate with a claim to influence. In order to elaborate, propagate and legitimize his critique of American life as well as his emerging vision, he published and re-published a remarkable number of critical essays and book-length studies. Frank's conviction "that I was *needed*" when he returned to New York in 1913 ("I Discover" 208) evidences his belief that intermediaries such as himself had an indispensable generative act to perform in America during the first wave of acceleration.

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[163] Here, Frank notes in his essay, "New York did not come in; New York stayed distant and silent" ("I Discover" 3).

[164] "[W]hen they did" talk about America, Frank claims in a retrospect, "they sneered, they jeered, they swore they were done with the barbaric land that had given them birth" ("I Discover" 10).

ASSOCIATION AND CRITICAL DISTANCING IN FRANK'S NON-LITERARY WRITINGS

At the time, however, the counter-discursive stance that Frank took to formulate his critique and his vision negatively impacted his standing as an American cultural commentator and avant-gardist. Frederick J. Hoffman aptly observes that this was the case because his "point of view alternates between cries of despair and echoes of hope" (250). For one, Frank's texts teem with confidence in the revolution of American letters, as do the paratexts by already acclaimed experimental writers such as Williams or Dos Passos (see chapter II.C). In the early issues of *The Seven Arts*, Frank sympathized with these writers in two more respects: Together with James Oppenheim, he expressed his great faith in the potential for "greatness" in modern American art and he joined Williams and Pound in applauding the ability of a little magazine such as *Seven Arts* to stimulate higher rates of aesthetic innovation: the magazine constantly poses a "challenge to the artist to surpass himself" (Oppenheim/Frank 52, 53; cf. Frank, "Concerning" 157).

The ideals that informed Frank's vision of modern American literature, however, considerably differed from the one embraced by writers such as Williams at the time. In 1924, Frank titled a collection of his essays '*Salvos*,' in whose preface he states that *The Seven Arts* declared a "war of a new consciousness, against the forms and language of a dying culture" when it was first launched in 1916 (14).[165] The 'dying culture' that Frank and his *Seven Arts* colleagues belligerently attacked, however, comprises not only the 'old' forms that other modernists, too, sought to overcome.[166] It also includes the speed-aesthetic used by many avant-gardists to adapt American letters to (the time-regimes of) modernity in seemingly all-encompassing ways. As the polemic term 'dying culture' already suggests, Frank's endeavor to distinguish and promote his own (aesthetic) stance involved the construction of oppositions that seem to rely on the reductive understanding of American modernism which was just established within the critical discourse, rather than on a careful, unbiased examination of divergences and parallels between his own and others' modernisms. This was still the case in 1933, when Frank retrospectively proclaimed that the American literary scene in the second half of the 1910s diverged into "two almost mutually exclusive tendencies," which both dissociated themselves from one another in equally programmatic terms: "One was centered on Ezra Pound, Alfred Kreymborg, the imagists, Harriet Monroe's 'Poetry' and 'The Little Review': the other was grouped about 'The Seven Arts'" ("Hart Crane" 99).[167] In pronounced opposition to the rhetoric of acceleration, which some other avant-gardists adopted, contributors to *Seven Arts* established their devotion to the alternate cause of forging an awareness about the negative repercussions of American speed-pioneering and of spreading what they called a "*disillusioned optimism*" among their readers (Oppenheim, "Expression [Jan. 1917]" 268). The idea was that the 'disillusioned optimist' critically assesses the status quo and, with a strong confidence in the future, develops remedies and alternatives for every modern American to apply: A generative rather than illusory optimism marks his approach.

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[165] The magazine folded after only one year in 1917 because its patron, Annette Rankin, took issue with the magazine's vocal opposition to the Great War and withdrew her financial support (cf. Blake 122; Frank, *Memoirs* 91). In the nine issues of *Seven Arts*, Frank fought this 'war' side by side with other cultural critics such as Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne and James Oppenheim, their critique and vision cross-fertilizing one another.

[166] Frank repeatedly underlined the "decrepitude" of 'old' forms and, quite like Williams, urged that they "no longer satisfy, they must soon be gone" ("Valedictory" 357). An advertisement for the May 1917 issue of *Seven Arts* in the *New York Times* is marked by a similar rhetoric: "This is the type of literature you will read in THE SEVEN ARTS – vital subjects written by strong, modern writers; [...] the Arts from a present-day standard what we truly feel and think, not what has been felt and thought for generations back. [...] It is new! – vital! – different!" (29 Apr. 1917, 68).

While the 'disillusioned optimist' Frank was writing his experimental novel *City Block* during the late 1910s, he constantly distanced himself from the other, more acclaimed camp in American avant-garde writing and expanded both his critique and his vision in a remarkable number of publications. Together with his fellow *Seven Arts* writers, Frank co-created this critique since 1916 and told it time and again in his own articles as well as in book-length (re-)publications: *Our America* (1919), *Salvos* (1924), *The Re-Discovery of America* (1929) and *In the American Jungle* (1937). In a similar way as other avant-gardists of the day, Frank produced a bulk of programmatic texts that would later function as paratexts to his longer prose, for instance *City Block*, in which he rephrases his critique and his vision for a larger reading public. The mere number of these short and long cultural-historical publications indicates that Frank was not only striving to control his critical diagnosis and vision (he rephrased them time and again). He somewhat enviously tried to emulate other writers' practice of self-promotion as well. Since Frank took a stance that clashed, often dramatically, with the norms and imperatives of the day, however, his self-promotion became a sort of self-distancing within the domain-specific discourse of acceleration.

Many of Frank's writings recast the history of American character-formation (from the colonial era to the twentieth century) as an essentially degenerative process, thus presenting a counter-narrative to heroic tales of westward expansion. The unpredictable conditions on the new continent, Frank claims in *Our America*, forced the American pioneer to cultivate a constant outward activity because it was the only possible way to "save himself from the sheer threat of becoming overwhelmed by his surrounding world" (21, cf. 46). Notably, Frank presents this process of behavioral adaptation as a form of speed-up: Lest being overwhelmed by the constant unexpected transformations occurring in their new lifeworld, American pioneers strove to constantly increase the amount of tasks completed within a given time period: Their "[e]nergy poured outward, poured unceasingly into material and practical exertion" (*Our America* 20).

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[167] Nonetheless, Frank's work occasionally appeared side by side with poems by Williams, for instance. In the August 1922 issue of *Secession*, Williams' poem "The Attempt" follows Frank's story "Hope."

According to Frank, this accelerant adaptive process of "exteriorization" persisted until the age of industrial-capitalist modernity, during which the "[t]rail of the pioneer [simply] hardened into the railroad. Pioneering became Industrialism" (*Our America* 45, 57). Yet in the modern age, the race of 'exteriorization' that once provided the pioneer with a sense of control gains a different quality, Frank claims: The "race came first. Then came the city that was its product. And now another race that is the product of the city" (*Our America* 174). In unison with anti-modernists as well as Marxist critics such as Siegfried Kracauer, Frank suggests in his studies that the modern phase of American pioneering eliminates the individual's self-determination. In *Re-Discovery*, he declares that "[w]e literally are *the hunted*" (76). In *Our America*, Frank elaborates that this state of heteronomy developed when the American individual was caught up in an overwhelming and self-amplifying system of immaterial forces – a system which bears a striking resemblance to Rosa's acceleration circle (see chapter I). Frank states in the same volume that "the industrial world which America had created now drives the American out into an endless 'exteriorization.' A sucking monster which, as it sucked swelled larger and sucked more" (45; cf. Kracauer, "Mass" 81). A "rigorous adjustment" to the *Takt* of the machine, Frank polemically claims, is the only option for the modern individual; acceleration becomes the "determining presence of our nature" ("Re-Discovery" 72, 75).[168] In this manner, Frank commonly described the process through which "bare movement" emerged as the "value" that distinguishes the 'successful'[169] pioneer in modern America ("Drug" 51).

In his 1927 essay "The Drug on the Market," Frank draws up an even more drastic comparison. He claims that the individual who has internalized the external pressure to increase his life's pace and has transformed it into an internal compulsion resembles a drug addict. In Frank's view, such a person "becomes nervous and restless" and "hungers to 'progress' with his drug to help him move; and also he aims to heighten the outward splendor of the drug itself, so that the world may judge his 'progress' in the world by it. Battening on change, he dares not stop" (52). Plainly, Frank's diction is derogatory and polemic. Nonetheless, he presents an apt diagnosis: Sociologists today still identify people's insatiable 'hunger' for acceleration as a behavioral pattern that occurs during sustained periods of acceleration. People who constantly accelerate their lives' pace to keep abreast of the collective race, they claim, feel under increasing time-pressure and thus relentlessly 'hunger to progress' even though they are, in fact, setting free an "abundance of time-resources" (Rosa, *Alienation* 31; "Beschleunigung" 1043). Throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century, Frank repeatedly refused to praise individuals who passed off this sort of constant progress as an achievement, as for instance architects, city planners, film directors and some literary modernists of the day did (see chapter II.A-II.C). Instead, he scolded the 'addict' of innovation and change as an individual who only focuses his energies on the momentarily satisfying achievement of progress ('hunger for') because he fears inertia. In fact, Frank suggests in his 1927 essay, the pioneer-addict is slave to the very 'substance' he publicly glorifies: He 'dares not stop' his progress lest lagging behind. In his longer studies, Frank expands this critique, underlining that "[e]very one [competes] for himself" in this unrelenting race, so that a "process of [social] atomisation" ensues (*Our America* 46; "Re-Discovery" 188).[170] As these exemplary quotes illustrate, Frank challenged heroic American tales during the first wave of acceleration. He re-interpreted acceleration as a descent into heteronomy and failure rather than as an ascent to control and success.

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[168] In *Re-Discovery*, Frank argues that people are "'run' by the particular desires which a machine fulfills – the desire to move, the desire to get rich, etc. – they were really being 'run' by their machines" (43-44).

[169] In the following chapters, I distinguish the common conception of success and failure, which I retrace in part one in this study, from the one that Frank, Asch and Borden promoted by putting the former in single quotation marks.

The disclosure of 'exteriorization's' negative effects on the inner, spiritual constitution of the individual is another key aspect of Frank's cultural critique. Although the American pioneer "type" appropriated the Puritan virtues of self-control and self-restraint[171] to keep his actions in sync with the world around him, this kind of adaptation "starved [the pioneer's] *inner* life [and] stunted his spiritual powers to infantile dimensions" according to Frank (*Our America* 17). In the author's reasoning, this happened because American pioneers took on only those quasi-religious elements that were known to "quicken[] all the machinery of [their] action" (i.e., asceticism and work ethics) and transformed them into an "essentially [...] irreligious" ideology of speed and progress (*Our America* 83). Although Frank focused on the depletion of the synchonized pioneer's spiritual life, his diagnosis anticipates Kracauer's remarks on the 'inner' constitution of the modern individual: In 1925, Kracauer criticized that any "rationalization of life that would accommodate it [life] to technology," making the individual "as smooth and shiny as an automobile," would finally "sacrifice[] man's intellectual (*geistigen*) constitution" as well as "repress man's intermediate spiritual (*seelisch*) layers" ("Travel" 69).[172] Six years earlier, Frank had similarly argued that "[v]irtues which lent themselves to material conquest and to endurance were extolled

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[170] The idea of atomization also shines through Frank's formulation that the American "was a particle of the chaotic flux, of America's manifest destiny of expansion" (190).

[171] In this respect, Frank reiterates an idea that Max Weber first presented in two articles, which appeared in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* in 1904 and 1905. The first English translation of Weber's seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was published in 1930.

[172] See Thorstein Veblen's sociological diagnosis in *The Instinct of Workmanship* as well: The individual living in an industrial context, Veblen claims here, has an "impersonal, quantitative apprehension and appreciation of things" and "tends strongly to inhibit and discredit the all imputation of spiritual traits" (318).

[and] virtues which called for inner peace or levied energy without a manifest material return were vices" (*Our America* 20). The imperative of unconditional 'exteriorization' inaugurated an "anti-mystical age" of rationalism and pragmatism, in which the American individual finds "*no time* for [...] that sensation of harmony which is in the sense of beauty," no time to indulge in philosophic reflection. Finally, this left the individual unable to "consult either his social or spiritual senses" according to Frank ("Introduction" 11; *Our America* 20, emphases added; cf. Blake 143; Dreiser 370). With these propositions, Frank rhetorically distanced himself from the narratives of American speed and progress that were common especially during the so-called roaring twenties. Even though Frank refused to solidarize with left-wing critics, or any political group for that matter, for the most part of the 1920s, his disillusioned verdict on 'the' American's inner life, marked him as a sympathizer of contemporary Marxists who attacks modern capitalism.[173] Frank's critique resonates with the tenets voiced by other (social, literary and political) movements of the day, yet the author distanced himself from these movements, too.

Frank vented his contempt of a modern American art that, in his view, simply reproduces (the temporal nature of) the modern age by "approach[ing] the nature of the machine" in the texts he published throughout the first two decades of the new century (Frank, "Re-Discovery" 96). He labeled such a literary, theatrical and filmic aesthetic "Utilitarian Art" in 1927, criticizing it for engraining the same deficits in the domain of American art as did the 'pioneer lifestyle' in the American individual ("Utilitarian" 143). Voicing a critique which resonated strongly with Frankfurt-School criticism of the day, Frank claimed that modern American art has lost its genuinely 'artistic' quality and has become an a-political, standardized reproduction of a machine: as each and every of its dimensions are geared towards "[e]fficiency, speed, [and] regularity, [which thus] become habiliments" ("Re-Discovery" 96; cf. "Creator" 319). The techniques commonly used by American experimental writers to "flash[] before us" a sequence of different impressions degrade their literary texts to trivial "journalistic writing [...] [that] sound[s] like a hasty handbook clipped together from a thousand daily columns" (Frank, "Vicarious" 299, 298; cf. "For a Declaration" 25; "Valedictory" 362).[174] During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Frank furthermore claimed that American film, theater and literature of this accelerated, modern kind is marked by a "grandiose externality" but also by a "blindness to the deeper dimensions of life" ("Vicarious" 299) and he asserted that its communicative, socio-critical and spiritual dimensions are neutralized, even eliminated: When art "lose[s] itself in the surface complexities of a civilization," it becomes "a mere expression of the materials from whose tyranny it rightfully should free us." In the author's view, this kind of art furthers the "blind cult of the American fact" that he saw proliferating within the overarching discourse of acceleration at the time ("Vicarious" 296; "Emerging" 73; cf. Oppenheim, "Expression [Dec. 1916]"). Frank's critique targets art forms that seemed to be mere "success-machine[s]"[175] and appeared designed only to satisfy the speed-craze of the pioneer mind, which turns to 'art' only "to be amused" by a "momentary titillation" ("Re-Discovery" 96; "German Theater" 676; *Our America* 29).[176] With these categorically denunciating statements, particularly the critique of American art's alleged political conformity, Frank built an alliance with Marxist critics of his day and reinforced a consistent, albeit reductive, counter-foil against which he set his own agenda and experiments.

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[173] Frank even distanced himself from the political tenor that other *Seven Arts* critics adopted during the Great War, criticizing "an invasion of surface forces, too close to political persuasion" (*Memoirs* 95). Frank openly solidarized with Communism since the late 1920s, when he became more occupied with left-wing politics and was even elected president of the communist League of American Writers in 1935 (cf. Rhav 26; Trachtenberg viii). For a more extensive assessment, see Frank's essay "How I Came to Communism" as well as Daniel Aaron's study *Writers on the Left*.

[174] In "Utilitarian Art," Frank condemns "the current works of the esthetes [...] [who are] engineering an escape from life" (144-45); "the commercial, the pornographic, the dully sensational, a whole school of haughty favorites" whose work (he names Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*) merely "register sensations" without "*using*" the matter at hand, "composing these sensations into organic life" (145, 146, 145).

As evident, Waldo Frank actively reprobated modernity and challenged common heroic narratives of American progress. The programmatic way in which he did so in his critical texts ideologically aligned him not only with Marxist critics but also with the Southern Agrarians, their anti-modern and anti-urban stance, rather than making him a central spokesperson of the modernist avant-garde in America. Frank, however, also distanced himself from these Agrarians by repeatedly asserting that he was in fact not radically oppositional and that he did not want to turn his back on the project of modernization in American art and beyond. He simply aimed to preserve what he called the "noblest function" of such a process: to not have it entirely "subserve the intellectually accepted forms of life: but to conquer new forms" ("For a Declaration" 25). As an alternative to the fast surface-aesthetic of 'utilitarian art,' Frank proposed a (psychologically) "deep art" and an aesthetic of in-betweenness ("Foreword" 117).

FRANK'S EARLY COUNTER-DISCURSIVE NOVELS

Before Frank first implemented this alternate conception in *City Block*, he published two fictional versions of his radical critique: *The Unwelcome Man* (1917, written in 1914/15) and *The Dark Mother* (1920). Both novels are conceived as negative versions of the Bildungsroman. They relate the stories of two young Americans who are both unable to establish "a sense of one-ness" and "harmony with [the] filthy hovels and cruel skyscrapers" in the metropolis (Frank, *Unwelcome* 176). In both *Unwelcome Man* and *Dark Mother*, the protagonist's initial fascination with urban modernity is superseded by disillusionment. The passage below illustrates how this is communicated in *Dark Mother*. It recounts the protagonist's first impression of urban modernity as he sits on a train which takes him from rural America to the metropolis.

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[175] In his essay "The Movies and the Masses," Frank criticizes that motion picture producers "made money because they have pleased the public. They will keep their money only so long as they hold off from agonizing their public" (113).

[176] Frank's diagnosis here resembles the pathological crave for meaningless stimulation that physician John H. Girdner classed as a symptom of an epidemic illness called 'Newyorktitis' in 1901: The American city-dweller, Girdner states in his study of the same name, "demand[s] of the theatrical managers such plays as 'In Gay 'New York'" and that her "daily paper must be highly spiced. It must contain all the latest gossip and scandal" (*Newyorkitis* 40).

> The lamps burnt fitfully overhead. Without was a dark rushing of buildings. Night and the City was there. [...] Black. A dim rushing of buildings – a rushing of swarming streets gutted with yellow lights. Life out there was burning against black – was being swept into black. [...] David looked out of the window seeing the City: and saw imprinted there the faces of David and his new friend – white, ghostly, real. His heart beat with agony and portent. (27)

This dystopian portrayal introduces the city as a fearsome and inhuman vista that rushes by as an alternation between dead dark (buildings) and (electric) light. The passage calls up the time-regime of the metropolis in the way dashes and full stops are used as temporal caesura within it. Additionally, it prefigures David's future existence in this very time-regime: David's reflection in the window merges his existence completely with the urban environment and it thereby literally reduces the three-dimensional person to a surface – to an insubstantial, translucent reflection. The diction in the passage meanwhile suggests that David will become alienated from his own self (consider the use of 'David' instead of 'himself') and that he will be deprived of his human, spiritual essence ('white, ghostly, real').

In both of Frank's counter-discursive novels, the protagonist eventually becomes a "speck caught in a pretty whirl that gulfed him [...] as if an ocean had risen to immerse him" (*Dark Mother* 171). In the "tearing shuffle of the crowd," the 'unwelcome man' Quincy finds it impossible to escape the "everlastingly mov[ing] [] turbid Stream," which leaves him "[a]lone in its [...] flow, of clinging death and leaping restlessness." Although Quincy is first driven by the idealistic impulse to retain his spiritual integrity as well as his sense of community, agency and harmony in the metropolis, he finally surrenders to the "clotted pressure" that he feels "edging him on to serve it and deny himself" (*Unwelcome* 370–71, 313). At the close of this rather pessimistic novel, Quincy has become just another assimilated, self-deceiving modern 'pioneer' who uses "sonorous names for the rhythm of their [his and his colleagues'] rotting," has subordinated his own desires and has dedicated all of his energy to modern business (*Unwelcome* 369).[177] Just as Frank's critical writings, these early novels repudiate idealizing narratives of American progress and they, ideally, lift the reader "into self-knowledge" about the detrimental effects of modern life (*Our America* 5). The label "exercise of social criticism," which William Bittner uses to describe *Unwelcome Man* and *Dark Mother* in his 1958 study is quite suitable (*Novels*

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[177] *Dark Mother* turns the sonorous gospel of 'exteriorization' into a swinging satire of American self-deception in passages such as the following: "'[C]hange your outlook on life, now that you are to become a part of the great City – a part of the great Machine. You'll be proud of it, soon enough. [...] Work! Service! And the ambition of each man is to die in harness. Of course, I mean the men who *succeed*. That is the one way to earn real money in New York. To think of absolutely nothing else: to give time to absolutely nothing else. There's the American ideal of Service for you.' He [David's uncle] paused and glowed upon his nephew who sat, stiffly erect, trying to believe, in order that he might like this talk. … 'And, my boy, what's the result? Don't you know? … America is the result'" (34–35)!

56; cf. Munson, *Waldo* 14). In these novels, Frank both solidifies his critical opposition to the overarching discourse of acceleration and he sympathizes with the political left. This kind of self-positioning, however, negatively impacted the marketability of his novels, as an advertisement for *Dark Mother*, which appeared in the *New York Times* on September 26, 1920, reveals: In the ad, Frank's publisher Boni and Liveright concedes that *Dark Mother* might "[n]ot [be] a perfect book" and appeals to the reader's good will, urging her to keep an open mind about Frank's admittedly unusual practice: "We urge you to buy this fine novel; we think you will agree with us that here is a novelist way above the ordinary."

"PLEASE DO NOT MISTAKE ME:" FRANK POSITIONS HIMSELF IN-BETWEEN

At the end of the 1920s, Frank, too, was concerned about the responses that his work was triggering. This concern was occasioned by his impression that critics were not only (rightly) identifying the critical content of his early novels but were, at the same time, wrongfully overemphasizing it in his more recent prose.[178] As a result, Frank felt, they tended to overlook the different quality of his more recent 'lyric novels'[179] *City Block* (1922), *Rahab* (1922) and *Holiday* (1923).[180] In these novels, Frank indeed implements an aesthetic of in-betweenness through which he conveys his criticism and his vision of life and letters in twentieth-century America in generative ways, as the second part of this case study will demonstrate. In 1928, however, Frank saw the need to plead: "Please do not mistake me. [...] I am not pessimistic. [...] But the notion that our country is at an apex of perfection is the most inept falsehood" ("Savage" 19–20).[181] This statement illustrates the author's urge to clarify his intermediate position. In it, Frank underlines his reluctance to side with both those who categorically condemn progress and speed as well as with those who glorify American modernity without addressing its downside. The radicalism of some of Frank's essays had indeed startled early modernist critics prior to 1928, when they were just branding American literary modernism as an essentially optimistic/nationalistic speed-aesthetic (cf. Munson, *Style* 181). It had led them to denigrate Frank as an anti-modern conservative – a clear-cut attribution that Frank was not willing to accept, as the author's 1928 intervention illustrates.[182] Not only James Sibley Watson attacked him in *The Dial.*[183] In 1922, the prominent critic of American modernism Matthew Josephson[184] published an "Instant Note on Waldo Frank," in which he claims that the "highly disturbing element" of *City Block* and *Rahab*'s style is that it literally lags behind the 'speed-machine pace' that other experimenters manage to implement in their texts: According to Josephson, Frank's prose is "giving the effect of the rhythmic spasms of the old gasoline motors found in back country districts" (58). Just as Watson, Josephson clarifies what, in his view, legitimately counts as 'successful' writing in modern America: "The effect of novelty [that] developes [sic!] through a fresh approach to the business of defining experiences by [...] William Carlos Williams, in E.E. Cummings, in Marianne Moore. Their speculation with syntax, their rebellions, are the consummation of a long straight line" ("Instant Note" 60). By including the old motor metaphor and the reference to allegedly more skillful engineers of American letters in his review, Josephson, it seems, anticipated that *Broom* readers would understand that he was referring to a singularly American aesthetic of speed in his praise of Williams, Cummings and Moore.

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[178] Frank's essays reveal that the author was sensitive to the dynamic of validation and regulation within the literary field. In the essay "The American Year" (*Neue Merkur*, June 1921; *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Sept. 1921), he discusses the "impact of cliques, the concerts of discordant voices acclaiming and backbiting, the parades of the self-important and the apocalyptic in these professional *bourses* of literary and dramatic and artistic stock" (201-02). In *Re-Discovery*, he notes that "to Americans, success is an exercise of power visible to the world. If some one else can't see it, it is not success" (93).

[179] Paul J. Carter states that "Frank uses the term 'lyric novels' to identify his new form which is, like a lyric poem, supposed to express subjective materials directly from the consciousness of the characters in dramatic episodes" (44).

[180] *City Block* was written earlier than *Rahab* but, due to its scandalous content, was published in a limited edition only (1,250 copies) under Frank's own name during the same year (see the advertisement for the limited edition in the *New York Times* issue on December 3, 1922). Although the first trade edition of *City Block* appeared only in 1929, I use *City Block* to assess Frank's alternate practice. Even though *Holiday* is still significant stylistically (it was promoted in *Broom*'s October 1923 issue as a novel in which Frank "has crystallized his method"), it is not relevant for this study because its central theme (race relations in the rural South) inaugurates Frank's turn from an investigation of metropolitan existence after his tour of the American South with Jean Toomer. Paul J. Carter writes that "Frank claims that he abandoned lyrical fiction with *Chalk Face* [1924] because the vein ran out, but the real reasons seem to be that he was losing interest in the form at the same time that he was becoming increasingly preoccupied with cultural history [of the rural South and Spain]. The loss of interest is suggested by the fact that *Chalk Face* is the least lyrical of the four novels and also the least experimental" (66; cf. Bittner, *Novels* 115).

[181] In *New Masses,* Frank similarly complained that Bernard Smith misrepresents him in the essay "The Sad Young Men": "I do not consider the universe inscrutable, nor man helpless within it. [...] I wish therefore to go on record in your pages to the effect that Bernard Smith [...] seems never to have read any of my works" ("Waldo Frank Protests" 21).

This side-by-side reading of Frank's plead from 1928 and contemporary reviews demonstrates that Frank's texts were frequently misconceived as pessimistic, anti-modern, and simply deficient because they appeared insufficiently adapted to the imperative of speed. It furthermore indicates, however, that Frank was indeed unwilling to position himself clearly in one 'camp' or another. Frank was certainly not a writer and critic whom his contemporaries could "place in ready pigeonholes" (Rosenfeld qtd. in Willingham 466): He sympathized with Marxist and anti-modernist as well as transcendentalist and spiritualist stances (see below). He opted for a combination of textual speed-up and traditional styles in his prose. Frank's reluctance to completely embrace either of these stances confounded critics at the time.[185] If he had decided to embrace one of these positions, it would have been likely that Frank, well-connected as he was within the literary field, would have been showered with critical acclaim. It is precisely the idiosyncratic way in which Frank moved in-between different positions of the day, however, that distinguishes him from other writers, who built self-promotional alliances to gain prominence and influence. Frank followed his own convictions and, from an intermediate position, warned only a month after Watson's "American Letter" that critics who "discover a new [modernist] masterpiece every week [...] are likely to overlook slighter but true significances in the local crops" ("American Year" 203). Frank was evidently an advocate of literary diversity and defied critics under whose scrutiny his 'lyric novels' were decried. Self-confidently, he claimed at the time that his hybrid texts could do more than Dos Passos' or Cummings' works, which merely reproduce the modern world but "transfigure[] nothing," as Frank claims in *Re-Discovery* (131).

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[182] The writers of experimental southern prose faced a similar problem, as Leigh A. Duck shows: "reactions to Caldwell's use of the literary grotesque vividly demonstrate how southern modernists' experimental representations were collapsed into hegemonic understandings of a backward South" (87).

[183] See my discussion of this verbal attack in the introduction of this study.

[184] See the previous chapter on the conceptual consolidation of American literary modernism for more information on Josephson's role as a critic of modernism. In *Broom*'s previous issue (Nov. 1922), he for instance demanded that icons of American modernity (skyscrapers, cinema, billposters) become the material on which American modern letters are crafted: "We must have poets who have dared the lightning, who come to us out of the heart of this chimera; novelists who express for us its mad humor" ("American Billposter" 309). Additionally, see the essay "Made in America."

[185] See Blake, who claimed that the *Seven Arts*' "promise of an American cultural renaissance was not an aesthetic counterpart to the ideal of a homogenous political nationalism that infused the pages of *New Republic* and inspired a generation of Progressive intellectuals and activists" (123). The *Seven Arts* critics were equally "distanced by temperament and conviction from the self-referential culture of literary modernism" (230).

FRANK'S SPIRITUAL VISION

While Frank was working on *City Block*, he began to propagate a post-Emersonian, spiritual-philosophical vision in his critical writings: Modern life can be transfigured into a form, he claimed, that alleviates the detrimental effects of acceleration. Three centuries of American pioneering had drained his people of an emotional, spiritual and social life. When he returned to the USA, Frank claimed that he "had a vision [at hand] [...] which gave me light and strength" (*Our America* 12)[186] and directly after his return, he began to elaborate extensively on his mystical vision of what he called "Wholeness" ("Re-Discovery" 19). Essentially, Frank envisioned that the modern American regains a spiritual consciousness that (re-)unites her with the surrounding world and enables her to counteract her "loss of transcendent religious belief" and the social and individual impairments, which ensue from the convergence of orthodox doctrines and the Darwinian rationale of American pioneering (the survival of the most flexible, the most industrious and fastest) (Blake 30; cf. Frank, *Memoirs* 4; *Novels* 22).[187] The first fictional account of such a re-emergence of an awareness of spiritual 'Wholeness' appeared in *The Dark Mother*:

> The air moved toward the mountain: the waves and the trees and the earth moved toward the mountain. All the world moved gently upward toward the mountain like a Tide. The mountain moved toward earth, spilled water and spread trees in it. A full-grown boy sat low in a canoe with his hands in the sharp water [...], there was silence. The boy lay back in his craft that lay in the water [...]. The mountain became a mood of contemplation. [...] Within this lay the boy [...]. He was immersed in depths that made him see new stars. [...] His mind

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[186] This vision allegedly came to Frank during a series of mystical experiences that he recorded in a notebook from 1920 (cf. Bittner, *Novels* 58–59).

[187] Frank's vision is not doctrinal in nature, and here he departed drastically from religious medical doctors such as John H. Girdner, who assessed how far the Newyorkitic had "departed from the normal [...] by comparing his moral views and opinions and conduct with the code laid down by the founder of Christianity" and proposed a return to Christian morality as a cure (*Newyorkitis* 59). Nilsen underlines that "Christian, Jewish and transcendentalist elements are combined [...] to form a religious response that will suit the needs of the emerging American nation that Frank described in the cultural histories" (29); Paul J. Carter agrees that Frank's "approach to literature, as well as to life, is intuitive and essentially religious without being theological or institutional [...] he uses the word 'God' only because there is no better one for identifying cosmic unity" (8; cf. Fingesten).

> awaked [...]. They [a grove of trees] stood there still above the lake and moved into his mood. [...] He looked about him, and the trees were in his eyes: [...] The trees opened their arms [...]: the world of black trees swept his being. [...] He was enclosed in a throbbing praying Thing. (1–3)

This passage from *Dark Mother* presents a natural panorama, in which every element 'moves toward' the other elements in a common rhythm (see the parallel constructions in the first three sentences). Within this scenery, the protagonist is situated. He gradually merges with a greater whole that extends beyond his own physical being. In *Re-Discovery*, Frank explains that such a 'fusion' of self and other occurs when an individual experiences 'Wholeness.' During this spiritual experience, "body and person become the focus for the *immediate* experience of what is beyond (although including them)" (29). Although David is astounded by the grandeur of this mysterious 'praying Thing,' his integration within the soothing 'arms' of the spiritual universe, which this 'Thing' seems to designate, opens his eyes to the mystical, immaterial 'unity' of all things: "Life? It had no center, no form, no way. It was a breathing rondure that fed him" (*Dark Mother* 10). In the remainder of the novel, this ideal state provides the contrastive foil for the deficient existence which David encounters in the metropolis.

Frank used his critical writings to explicate as well as to propagate this vision of a spiritual, harmonious existence – an endeavor considerably complicated by the fact that his central terms and concepts remain rather elusive ('Wholeness,' 'unity,' 'Personhood').[188] In his many critical texts, Frank employs these terms and concepts, yet only if one reads all of these texts together, a vague idea of their meaning emerges. In contrast to the male pioneer as well as to the "efficient lady" (Frank, *Memoirs* 7), Frank defined the modern 'Person' (with a capital 'P') as someone who is "aware of his unity with all things" (Bittner 61). In *Re-Discovery*, Frank professes that only if an American individual "live[s], consciously, within a Whole that holds all life," he can "achieve his health" in the modern lifeworld (19). Frank's conception of a healthy and joyful existence, however, does not leave the 'Person' isolated within an immaterial 'Whole' of the natural world, as the passage from *Dark Mother* suggests. Frank explains in *Re-Discovery* that such an existence requires the 'Person' to establish a connection with his own self as well as his physical and his social environment: "Wholeness must be both personal and social, in order to be either" (19). The state of 'Personhood' fundamentally clashes with the 'pioneering lifestyle,' which is premised on individual advancement, self-sufficiency and competition rather than sociability, emotionality or spiritual introspection, according to Frank.

The same is true for the conscious, prolonged *experience* of mystical-spiritual 'Wholeness,' which Frank identifies as a prerequisite for an individual to exist as a 'Person' in his non-literary texts. A sort of conversion experience may initiate the individual to this ideal state, yet only its prolonged presence (i.e., a constant awareness of 'Wholeness') turns the individual into a 'Person.' Frank's elaborations anticipate the differentiation of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, which Walter Benjamin famously establishes in his 1940 essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire:" the fleeting sequence of *Erlebnisse*, which are "not [...] experienced explicitly and consciously" by the American pioneer differ from an *Erfahrung* (for instance of 'Wholeness') that results from a time-intensive process of reflection during which *Erlebnisse* are "incorporated directly in the register of conscious memory" (Benjamin 317). Already in his 1919 study *Our America,* Frank proposes that the *Erfahrung* of 'Wholeness' can only ever materialize during decelerated moments since it "takes time and mediation [...] [and it] demands the stoppage of headlong muscular activity [i.e., 'exteriorization']," which has become a taboo throughout the history of American pioneering (22). In his critical texts, Frank promotes the *Erfahrung* of 'Wholeness' as an alternative to the pioneering lifestyle, which is a sequence of thrilling *Erlebnisse*. He proclaims that "moments and places are real to us only in so far as" they are "dwelt in," if we "put ourselves *within* them" ("Drug" 52). Accordingly, Frank states that an *Erfahrung* of 'Wholeness' only emerges if the 'Person' actively "transfigures" the "multiverse" of his lifeworld into a 'Whole' with an ongoing "conduit of his senses" ("Re-Discovery" 21). Such a gradual transfiguration of the multiverse enables the 'Person' to "experience the organic unity between his self, the objective world, and the cosmos," Frank claims in *Re-Discovery* (21). At times, Frank uses the term 'unity' as a synonym for 'Wholeness' yet in comments such as the following, it transpires that 'unity' denotes a more concrete form of connectedness between different elements of the world that is not necessarily spiritual in nature: "The physical unity of the world [...] cannot mean wholeness unless the principle of wholeness is within us" ("Re-Discovery" 43). In Frank's view, the 'unity' that exists or materializes between different elements of the world (people, objects, etc.) is an auspice of 'Wholeness,' yet the latter can only materialize within the conscious 'Person,' who attains a permanent awareness of the mystical 'Wholeness' of himself, the external world and the cosmos.

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[188] Reviewers of the day, here the anthropologist Edward Sapir, similarly felt that it was "a pity that he [Frank] disdains lucidity and courts the 'vatic' prose" (833).

As he promotes 'Personhood' as a positive form of autonomy, Frank stresses that the self is neither self-sufficient (as the American pioneer), nor entirely obsolete during the experience of spiritual 'Wholeness.' The 'Person' simply recognizes that she exists in "organic continuity" with everything else around her (Frank, "Introduction" 11): Any "sense of Wholeness," he writes in *Re-Discovery*, "without abandoning the personal which is at its core, reaches beyond it" (25). Even though Frank does not explain how or why the individual first attains a state of 'Personhood' or how the 'Person' may still function within the metropolis, he proposes in his non-literary work that a permanent awareness of 'Wholeness' enables the modern individual to find "happiness in harmony with his surroundings" and will, more generally, convert the nation from a "herd" into a "conscious people" (*Our America* 94, 211; Frank, "Re-Discovery" 208).[189]

Frank's contention that the experience of 'Wholeness' depends on an honest and extended (i.e., decelerated) engagement with self and other is linked to his critique that the shortcomings of modern pioneering are muted in the American discourse. Finding health and joy in modern America means to "escape, not from it [the lifeworld], but from its superficial lies," Frank noted (*Our America* 139). In this respect, Frank's vision might have seemed irreconcilable with the collective project of American pioneering, which thrived on self-reliance, flexibility and forward-directedness instead of sociability, persistence and reflection. It ran counter to the value system that had emerged within the discourse of acceleration, which pushed individuals towards ever more economy, self-denial and competition, at least in Frank's view. The author's contention that there is an alternate form of existing in the modern lifeworld, however, marked him as an intermediary who also took issue with cultural conservatives, who believed, like Kracauer, that the "infinite and the eternal can never be contained in any life here" ("Travel" 73) or, like Emerson, thought a "withdrawal" from the American lifeworld was inevitable (Frank, *Our America* 70; cf. Blake 266; P. J. Carter 9). Repeatedly, Frank stated that his vision does not embrace extremes, but the in-between:

> I am no enemy of the machine, no harker-back in dialectic disguise to an impossible romantic or Tolstoyan Nature. [...] The present capacity of the machine to surround man, to determine the forms and colors of his acts, [...] is a negative reflex of man's incapacity as yet to create a Whole in modern terms, and to assimilate the machine [...] within it. ("Re-Discovery" 42–43)

As Casey N. Blake summarizes, Frank's critique "took aim at the ideology that promoted a cult of technological novelty and the acceptance of automatism as the standard of social behavior" (269). A central conviction that Frank apparently gained through his extensive, prolonged engagement with American history and culture was that he needed to reassert what he called the "true values of existence in the American world" in the American age of acceleration (*Our America* 130). In 1922, Frank published the novel *City Block*, in which all of the concerns addressed in the first part of this case study seem to converge: *City Block* presents itself as a novel designed to move the delusive nature of the discourse of acceleration into the limelight, to occasionally co-opt common techniques of textual speed-up, to bring the detrimental effects of American speed-pioneering into relief and, finally, to reassert spirituality, sociability, emotionality and harmony as the 'true values' of life – as the prerequisites for a healthy and socially connected life in twentieth-century America.

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[189] American society, Frank argues, resembles "a herd" which is "hypersensitive to in response to the disturbance that menaces it as a whole" (i.e., the imperative of acceleration) but "deaf to the fate of individual components" (*Our America* 212). Compare John Dewey's critique that "the machine age in developing the Great Society has invaded and partially disintegrated the small communities of former times without generating a Great Community," which he formulated most famously in *The Public and its Problems* in 1927. Dewey defines the 'Great Community' as "a society in which the ever-expanding and intricately ramifying consequences of associated activities shall be known in the full sense of that word, so that an organized, articulate Public comes into being" (314, 350). In contrast to Frank, however, Dewey bases his ideal of the democratic public on a political conviction rather than a spiritual one and claims that he is "not concerned with prophesy but with analysis" (351).

III.A.2 RECOVERING 'WHOLENESS' IN THE MODERN AMERICAN NOVEL: *CITY BLOCK*

> [W]e are proud of the short cuts with which we clutter and sterilize our world. Newspapers, telephones, radios, are imperious short cuts, demanding that we devote an ever-increasing portion of our days to details and surfaces of men and matters we might well ignore. [...] [This] drug eliminates the ground between the 'beginning' and the 'end.' But [...] [t]he between is life. [...] [L]ife's loveliness [...] dawns on men only when they are forced to pause.
>
> Waldo Frank. "Drug," 1927 (53-54)

Ignorance, self-centeredness, reckless speed and superficiality: These are the alleged effects of (technological) acceleration that Waldo Frank criticized repeatedly throughout this writings, as this quote once again demonstrates. Within his 'lyric novel' *City Block*, Frank aimed to create an American prose that truly "transfigure[s]" rather than merely reproduces the 'imperious' "rhythm of our age" – the age of speed. By doing so, he readily took the risk that publishers again turn down his prose because they would claim that "there's no public in America for such unconventional a tale [...] and there are no readers for so unconventional a form," as fourteen of them had when refusing to publish Frank's more conventional novel *Unwelcome Man* (Frank, "Jazz" 123; Frank, "A Foreword After" ix–x).[190]

City Block is composed of fourteen self-contained stories, each of which focuses on a different inhabitant of the eponymous city block. Three of these stories were published during Frank's stay in Europe[191] as simple tales of "futility of life in a modern city." For publication in *City Block*, Frank transformed them into experimental stories of "mystic vision" (P. J. Carter 50; cf. Frank, *Memoirs* 62). The following analysis will elucidate that *City Block*, in its formal, stylistic and thematic conception, is designed to implement a generative agenda: to propagate an alternate vision of modern existence and to animate the reader to overcome the sterile and superficial life that Americans were allegedly leading in the modern age. Close reading of selected stories will reveal that Frank's narrative problematizes the detrimental effects of life in a context of ubiquitous acceleration: it constantly calls up, co-opts and challenges common American narratives, values and techniques of acceleration. They will moreover unearth which specific stylistic, formal and thematic mechanisms are employed in *City Block* to "bring[] *into* the consciousness [of its readers] [...] quantities and values of life which mind alone is unable to perceive" (Frank, "For a Declaration" 25).

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[190] Kenneth Burke calls already *Dark Mother* a "transitional novel" (qtd. in Munson 86). Paul J. Carter notes that "the technique in *The Dark Mother* is more skillful than in *The Unwelcome Man.* The descriptions of nature are more poetic; those of New York more forceful and vivid" (42). Munson writes that the novel "shows a smooth short rhythm, directness when needed, an exact freshness in figures of speech, and a *vers libre* derivation" (*Waldo* 30). I agree with scholars who, in one way or the other, suggest that Frank "not yet devised a technique which will effectively link his temperament and his esthetics into a meaningful whole" before *City Block* (P. J. Carter, *Waldo* 43).

[191] For a complete record of the earlier appearances of these stories since 1915, see Bittner, *Novels* and Paul J. Carter.

Since it is my contention that Frank, Asch and Borden all designed their novels to both call up the discourse of acceleration and to refute it, I am particularly interested in the in-built mechanisms through which *City Block* keeps its own meaning as carefully in check as Frank tried to do by rephrasing his criticism and vision time and again in his non-fictional texts. Although the title of Frank's novel establishes the setting as a metropolitan, typically American and modern one, a prefatory note that is printed on the page opposite to the contents draws the reader's attention to *City Block*'s 'otherness' at a remarkably early stage: "*The author assures the reader that* City Block *is a single organism and should be read in order"* (8). This statement pre-structures the reading process, assuring the reader from the outset that *City Block*'s organization differs from critically acclaimed 'word machines' because it represents a kind of organic unity. Thus, the statement counters the associations that are potentially triggered by the title as well as by a cubist image which is printed below the title: It establishes *City Block* as a modern American novel of a different kind – as a novel that will not confront the reader with an ultra-modern, discontinuous and abstract portrayal of urban modernity but with some sort of organic unity. The chapter titles "Faith" and "John the Baptist," which the reader encounters in the table of contents, have a similar function: they indicate that this 'unity' is spiritual in kind. In this way, both the introductory statement and the chapter titles repudiate that *City Block* might be what Frank (and other critics at the time) considered a 'typical' modern(ist) novel from the outset. At the same time, they sensitize the reader to the signs of spiritual/organic 'unity' that are included in the ensuing narrative.

After he has read one or two 'chapters' of *City Block*, however, the reader quite possibly apprehends that Frank's novel can neither be classified as a conventional, nor as a thoroughly 'modernist' prose text. The fourteen 'chapters' do neither form a coherent story arc, nor do they qualify as an assembly of diverse, unrelated and stylistically experimental surface-thrills. They are relatively self-contained stories that are concerned with the 'deeper' (i.e., psychological) layers of individual life in the metropolis. Just as Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg Ohio* (1919), in which each story concerns a different citizen, or even the 244 free verse monologues in Edgar Lee Master's stylistically more radical *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), *City Block*'s stories linger with individual inhabitants of the city block. Extensive discourse time and page-space is dedicated to deep-reaching character profiles: Each story elucidates the problems of the respective block inhabitant and suggests what he or she requires in order to fill her life with more harmony.

Essentially, this reading verifies Joseph W. Beach's 1932 notion that Frank's novels are "modernistic" in their formal (and often also their stylistic) conception, yet that they still allow a "sympathetic insight into souls." This hybrid conception differs from "swift-flitting panorama[s]" of the day, which seemed to leave "no respite, no pause, no place of rest, no self-collection and retirement [for the reader] to take counsel of the spirit" (J. W. Beach 489, 496, 444).

"ACCOLADE:" A MODERN LITERARY HOMAGE TO ALTERNATE VALUES

Although most of the stories in *City Block* are not explicitly related to one another,[192] except for their shared location, each of them seems designed to implement a generative effect: they unravel a critical diagnosis and, at the same time, unravel Frank's vision of 'unity' and spiritual 'Wholeness.' "Accolade," the story that opens *City Block*, features a distinct, quite graspable manifestation of the 'unity' described in the prefatory note, which verifies that this 'unity' is indeed a spiritual one, as some of the chapter titles in the table of contents suggest. The opening of "Accolade" situates the plot in the metropolis and, in the way it stylizes the protagonist, draws the reader's attention immediately to one of the novel's primary concerns: temporality.

> CLARENCE LIPPER stepped from the Office into Christmas Eve.
>
> His eyes went out, a gloved hand moved upward, gave a tilt to his derby hat. This, his response to what his eyes took in. Then he plunged.
>
> He was not lost.
>
> Below the brim of his hat was a bit of auburn bang and a clear brow. His hat and his features did not go together: perhaps the reason why his hat was so far tilted upward. There was a small fine nose, pushing; a small warm mouth, taking cold air; blue eyes. Against these, in adverse rhythm a hat that tilted, a bamboo cane that swung, shoes spat-ted. Here was *presto*, eyes and nose and mouth were *andantino*. [...]
>
> Under its [the street's] spume of shopping multitude, his body had its pace, his mind its channel. (Frank, *City* 15)

The razor salesman Clarence is introduced as an American urbanite who, in many ways, seems successfully adapted to the metropolitan *Takt*: As Clarence leaves his workplace, he shortly screens the passing crowd and expands his field of vision (tilting the hat) in order to survey the street scene at once with an analytical glance. Once he plunges into the stream of the crowd, Clarence is thus immediately able to synchronize his movement with the crowd's pace, which is indicated by the movement of his hat, cane and shoes. All the while, he preserves a sense of control. In all of these respects, the opening of "Accolade" calls up the temporal nature and behavioral norms of modern city life.

The cited passage, however, also bespeaks a discord that exists between Clarence's organic/biological rhythm and the metropolitan *Takt* to which he accelerates the movement of his limbs: The natural and moderate *andantino* tempo of his mouth, eyes and nose clash with the significantly accelerated *presto* pace of his steps.[193] The cane and the hat (Clarence's external attributes) are animated to the same velocity. Such a fast pace is not only 'adverse' in the sense that it differs from Clarence's inherent, 'organic' tempo. It is adverse in the sense that it harms him, as the reader learns a little later in the narrative.

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[192] Characters who serve as the protagonist in one story appear as minor characters in another story; several stories negotiate differing approaches to a common problem (repressed desire, alienation, lack of purpose, uprootedness) or specify certain aspects of the novel's vision that appear in preceding stories.

As the tonal staccato of plosives in the word 'spat-ted,' as well as the economized, sometimes even elliptical style in the quoted passage ('a small fine nose, pushing; a small warm mouth, taking cold air; blue eyes') indicate, techniques of textual speed-up are employed in the opening of "Accolade." The narrative thus aligns itself with canonical texts, many of which appeared designed to reproduce the *presto Takt* of the modern world. In the subsequent paragraph of "Accolade," the quantity of temporal-textual markers even grows, increasing the textual velocity even further: "The street was cold and close. Two sides were stores .. were sieves, sucking, barring. The multitude was agitant, yet constant" (15). Within these three sentences, techniques of phonetic roughening generate a terse textual *Takt* that evokes the temporality of the metropolis. A relatively inconspicuous alliteration of [k] sounds ('cold and close') is followed by a more complex alliteration of [s] sounds in the second sentence ('sides were stores .. were sieves, sucking'). The speed of this sentence is further increased by the ellipsis that cuts down the number of words used (marked by two full stops '..') as well as by the repetition of 'were.' The sentence terminates with a homeoteleuton, a repetition of endings that has a similar effect ('sucking, barring'; 'agitant, yet constant'). The opening of *City Block* calls up the new value of acceleration not only on the level of content. Techniques commonly used in avant-garde evocations of modern speed, too, mark "Accolade" as a 'successfully' synchronized experimental rendering of urban America.

Even though the narrative initially seems to embody this new value, it problematizes the ways in which the overarching discourse of acceleration (i.e., its imperatives and micro-power) impacts individual and social life in the metropolitan story world. Clarence is portrayed in a similar way as "the figures of the new age, cold men, clear men, impersonal men" whom Anderson criticizes in *Perhaps Women* nine years later (101). On the second page of "Accolade," an encounter between Clarence and his acquaintance Biff Daley exposes both the micro-power that affects people's actions in the metropolis and the anti-social behavior which 'successfully' synchronized people such as Clarence show even after they have left work on Christmas Eve. Biff crosses the straight path that Clarence cuts "with sharp shoulders through the churn" (15), momentarily decelerating Clarence's movement. He thus arrests their bodies in momentary stasis.

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[193] As a common tempo mark, *andantino* indicates a moderate tempo that is "a little faster than andante," which is "walking speed," while *presto* indicates a "very fast" tempo – it is the second fastest tempo mark (Blatter 14).

During this instance, Biff and Clarence are united in deceleration and become an inert obstacle that diverts the current of the after-work crowd, as the narrative emphasizes with the phrase "stood, parting the slakish crowd" (17). Notably, this forced occasion of deceleration thwarts Clarence's positive disposition. This is the case, the narrative suggests, because any deterrent to his speed of life triggers an act of regulation: "Clarence threw up his head and let his selfcontrol beam on the low spaces of his friend. [...] About his face surged the people, blind blank faces all about" (17). This account emphasizes that Clarence has internalized the imperative of acceleration and that he uses a form of micro-power to regulate divergent others (here Biff). The diction in the second sentence illustrates the narrative's critical diagnostic mode: Verbs such as 'to surge' and adjectives such as 'blind' and 'blank' indicate to the reader that the synchronized state, which Clarence seeks to uphold just as well, turns people into hostile and alienated, blind and blank-faced individuals. Clearly, such a portrayal clashes with common American representations of speed and synchronicity, in which positive elements were emphasized (see chapter II).

City Block's counter-discursive stance furthermore surfaces in the contrast that is drawn up between Clarence and Biff in "Accolade." While the former is portrayed as unapproachable, the latter is introduced as a friendly, "laughing" individual who extends Christmas wishes and asks Clarence to drink to the occasion with him. This contrast inverts the normative order that had been established within the overarching discourse of acceleration, which is called up in "Accolade:" slowness is portrayed in a positive light while speed is presented as a source of grim determination, pure 'exteriorization' and unhealthy self-restraint. Clarence's contention that devotedness and hiatus are things that "[c]an't be done" by him, an individual who feels the ever-accelerating *Takt* of urban America impinge all around him (*City* 16), similarly suggests that the pace of life in the city creates an anti-social climate.

In departure from this critical reassessment of speed and synchronicity in the beginning of "Accolade," the narrative refutes the imperative of acceleration altogether and introduces its spiritual vision. It presents 'the spiritual' as a force that may liberate the modern individual momentarily from his alienated, fast-paced life:

> The sky cracked open.
> Like a little red bird came
> a brightness
> downward.
>
> It grew. Below the sky, over the blind multitude, came Jesus .. [...] Very softly with his forefinger he touched the pursed firm lips of Clarence. [...]
>
> Clarence Lipper was large. The crowds of the City, shopping, shrank. But he stood pendulous before his friend. His arm swung loose. There was a wonderful thirst in his mouth. (17–18)

Notably, the narrative itself metamorphoses into an alternate version of modern prose in this passage. It is again marked by the accelerant techniques that ate employed to reproduce the speed of metropolitan life previously in the novel. At this point, however, these techniques evoke a moment of divine descent – a spiritual visitation that clashes with the maxims of rationality, efficiency and utilitarianism, which dominate people's life and work in the metropolitan story world. The quoted passage certainly calls up Cummings' accelerant techniques of lineation (see chapter II.C.2), yet here, this technique is employed to express the slowly unfolding moment of an approaching 'Spirit,' which liberates Clarence from the shackles of the speed imperative on Christmas Eve. In "Accolade," experimental techniques are not merely used to reproduce the frantic *Takt* of metropolitan life. They serve to evoke a spiritual dimension of human experience as well. The portrayal of fast-paced modernity and of a spiritual encounter in "Accolade" sheds a critical light on accelerated lifestyles and it introduces an alternate literary style that enhances modern American letters with a spiritual dimension.

On the level of content, the scene above introduces, albeit vaguely, the mystical 'conversion experience' that Frank describes in his non-literary texts. When Biff forces Clarence to pause, a spiritual force[194] suddenly approaches and liberates the razor salesman's body from the dominance of the metropolitan *Takt*. Clarence now stands 'pendulous,' with his arms swinging freely. Moreover, his presence suddenly expands in the story world of industrial modernity, while the dominance of the latter dwindles ('Clarence Lipper was large. The crowds of the City, shopping, shrank'). Basic human instincts reclaim their influence on Clarence ('a wonderful thirst'). As he follows Biff towards the bar, the portrayal suggests, he will not only satisfy his natural craving for liquor but he will satisfy his humane thirst for social connectivity and liberty. "Daley *locked* an arm in the arm of Clarence. They marched off, humming *two tunes*" (*City* 18, emphases added). This description indicates that the spiritual encounter changes Clarence even though it does not make him aware of his own 'unity' with the objective world and the cosmos, as it would have, had he reached the state of 'Personhood.' Nevertheless, Clarence enters a social 'unity' with Biff, which leaves their selves intact: they hum two different tunes together. This portrayal in "Accolade" introduces the state of 'unity' as a concrete manifestation of inter-personal connectedness, which is in itself not strictly spiritual but may emerge from a spiritual encounter. In any case, the portrayal suggests that a 'unity' may materialize when individuals decelerate and dedicate some of their time to other urbanites.

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[194] Given Frank's rejection of doctrinal religion, it is surprising that the name Jesus is used in this instance, yet this may simply imply that 'Jesus' is the first association that the focalizer Clarence has at this point. In any case, the use of 'Jesus' most effectively marks the situation as a spiritual encounter. It signals that the 'unity' in the opening statement might be spiritual in nature.

The second part of "Accolade" dramatizes the fact that the spiritual encounter represents a conversion experience that miraculously sensitizes Clarence for the 'true' values of life: deceleration, sociability and compassion. Having parted with Biff, Clarence is first again engulfed by the "dispersive sweep" of the crowd, which "dragged him" on. The protagonist intuitively falls back into his usual behavioral patterns: He walks through the "hostile" houses of his block "with hunched shoulders, back bent, head thrust [...] ... not caring, not seeing" (*City* 18). This dystopian portrayal moves the physical and social decay in the modern city back into focus[195] – and it reinforces the merit of the state that Clarence was in directly after the spiritual encounter. On this notion, a classic tale of spiritual enlightenment is based in the subsequent scenes of "Accolade." Even though Clarence cannot (yet) grasp the reason why he is filled with "[g]reat warmth" and [e]nthusiasm" when he encounters two less fortunate inhabitants of the block, he suddenly shows an impulsive compassion for the "ancient [Jewish] man" who "was very still" as well as to the "broken miserable woman" called, quite tellingly, Mrs. Luve (*City* 23, 20, 20). Dramatizing the change in Clarence, the narrative focuses on the protagonist's perplexity about his own altered behavior: It seems "out of perspective, so unnatural, absurd" to him to introduce himself to the old Raphael Stanislavsky and Mrs. Luve and to wish them a 'Merry Christmas.' As though by force of habit, Clarence tells himself that the man must be "crazy or something" and that Mrs. Luve, the woman who "sat very still" as he talks of his problems, with "her eyes gently placed on his," must be "ugly, battered, miserable, [...] hideous and foul" (*City* 23, 24, 21, 25, 25, 24). At the end of the story, Clarence receives his accolade for this new-found benevolence ("He felt he talked like an angel") as well as for the "natural" emotions he shows during his conversations: Mrs. Luve gives him an antique silver brush-and-comb to give to his wife on Christmas Morning even though – or, rather, because – Clarence has allowed himself to spend the money he had originally wanted use to purchase a new comb to click glasses with Biff and help the old Jewish man. Mrs. Luve's statement that the antique brush-and-comb "are lots better than new" when she hands it to Clarence underlines the value of the old and the durable (*City* 22, 26, 25). In the end, it is clear that the old Jew's prophesy – "*you* will haf a Merry Christmas" – comes true because Clarence begins to deviate from the norm and lets the (Christian) values of slowness, sociability and compassion inform his actions (*City* 21). Even though Clarence still professes "I don't understand" at the close of "Accolade" (27), the first story of *City Block* begins to draw the reader's attention to the detrimental effects of high-speed living and to the alternate values and lifestyles, which make modern life more livable. Clarence's expression of incomprehension potentially animates her to deduce the meaning of "Accolade" for herself.

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[195] Here, it sides with diagnoses presented by such pioneering social reformers as Jane Addams, who wrote in 1912 that "just because men are crowded into hotels, apartment houses, and tenements, and constantly jostle each other upon the street" does not mean that they are in any way 'connected;' that they engage in "social intercourse" in any way (615).

"Accolade" only vaguely hints at the spiritual vision of modern life that Frank propagated in his non-literary writings. Nonetheless, the first story of *City Block* introduces many of its crucial elements to the reader: the mystical-spiritual nature of the experience, the individual's changed relation to others around him and the fact that compassion and interpersonal connections are closely linked to relative slowness. Since it includes these distinctive elements and pits them against a dystopian portrayal of metropolitan life, the narrative proposes that neither a synchronized isolationist such as Clarence at the outset, nor any fast-paced modern text should be celebrated as a 'success' in twentieth-century America. The enlightened hero of the modern age and the literary text that emancipate themselves from the imperative of speed and devote space and time to alternate values of life truly merit accolade, at least in the novel's logic.

ALTERNATE COMBINATIONS: SENTIMENTALISM AND MODERN LYRICISM IN "MURDER"

The thirteen narratives that succeed "Accolade" in *City Block* elaborate the spiritual vision of modern life, continue to promote slowness, sociability and compassion as 'true' values and co-opt the prestigious aesthetic of speed even more strongly for their own purposes: They present critical diagnoses, evoke the deeper (psychological) layers of existence for the reader and, at times, even present him with portrayals of social 'unity' or spiritual 'Wholeness.' In the second story, for instance, the clipped style which marks the opening of "Accolade" is gradually 'deepened.' While it is re-employed in the first part of "Murder" to communicate a sense of interpersonal 'unity,' it takes on a 'lyric' quality in the three succeeding parts: it expresses the protagonist's subjectivity; her psychological state of "terrible loneliness" (Munson, *Waldo* 55).[196]

The first part of "Murder" introduces Sophie Breddan and Anna Suchy. The women meet during a chance encounter in the hallway of their apartment building and discover that they are both pregnant. "Murder" turns out to be a hybrid narrative: A number of 'old' tropes of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sentimental fiction are rehabilitated and combined with modern stylistic experiments.

> [L]ooking at one another, feeling the sacrament of their own life in one another, feeling themselves so – [...] They were like trees in the Spring, giving forth bloom. [...] Sophie sat at her sewing machine: while Anna chattered, listening Sophie hummed. Naked arms, thin, very long upon the wood and the white cloth. Black hair drawn tight and knotted [...]. Sophie worked and hummed: Anna felt her eyes. (Frank, *City* 32)

This passage illustrates the way in which the bond that has materialized between Anna and Sophie is evoked in "Murder." Sentimental tropes such as feminine intimacy, emotionality, motherhood, spirituality and domesticity (cf. Dobson 266–67; Williamson 3) indicate that an emotional bond, unaffected by the economic concerns of the masculine public sphere, exists between these two women. In "Murder," however, the sentimental portrayal is focused on the distinctive elements of social 'unity' that Frank's non-literary texts detail as well. In this scene, for instance, each woman has gained a sense of self by feeling the other in herself and herself in the other. Such a description goes beyond the "emotional and philosophical ethos that celebrates human connection" in sentimental fictions (Dobson 266). It acquaints the reader with the idea that the individual who is conscious of her 'unity' with her immediate (social) environment establishes a closer relation with her innermost self as well. Even though there is no indication that Anna and Sophie realize that there exists a spiritual 'Wholeness' of self, objective world and cosmos, the passage from "Murder" indicates that Sophie and Anna's *Erfahrung* of 'unity' entails a social as well as a spiritual dimension: They are 'feeling the sacrament of their own life in one another.' Building on the portrayal in "Accolade," "Murder" thus shows that both women have entered a state of 'unity;' a preliminary stage of 'Personhood' to which Clarence is initiated through the spiritual encounter. The opening of "Murder" confronts the reader with another vague vision of decelerated spirituality, intimacy and emotionality, which strongly reverberates with the portrayal in "Accolade," thus strengthening the potential of *City Block* to sensitize the reader to an alternate set of values and a spiritual dimension that enhances human life in urban settings.

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[196] A similar endeavor to create a psychological profile, that is, a sense of a character's feelings and thoughts, through experimental prose can be discerned in the first part of "Kabnis," the dramatic piece which concludes Jean Toomer's *Cane*: "Well, I'm damned. This godam is sure getting the best of me. Come, Ralph, old man, pull yourself together. Nights cant last forever. Thank God for that. [...] All right. Slip under the sheets. Close your eyes. Think nothing … a long time … nothing, nothing. Dont even think nothing. Blank. Not even blank. Count. No, mustnt count. Nothing … blank … nothing … blank … space without stars in it" (117).

With such a re-acclamation of sentimental values, Frank's narrative could not diverge further from the radical rhetoric of efficiency and progress that proliferated within the overarching discourse of acceleration at the time. While these values are reclaimed as assets for the male city-dweller in "Accolade," they are presented as a (rather conservative) ideal of modern femininity in "Murder." It goes without saying that both of these ideals clash with the modern American pioneers' pursuit of individuality, self-restraint and 'exteriorization,' which Frank criticizes in his nonfictional texts. As Suzanne Clark points out, "[f]rom the point of view of literary modernism, sentimentality was both a past to be outgrown and a present tendency to be despised" (2). Jennifer A. Williamson adds that sentimental fictions had come to designate "melodramatic, flat representations that were deemed unrealistic, unsophisticated, and un-literary" by the late nineteenth century – at least in the eyes of the avant-garde (5). Going against current vogues in the literary field, Frank rehabilitates tropes sentimental fiction to promote an alternate lifestyle which does not negate or suppress the social, emotional and spiritual dimensions of life. Just as the female writers of 'sentimental modernism,' Frank evidently opposed the notion that the sentimental cannot be the "source of transgression, resistance, or progressive cultural change" – a notion "fundamental to American modernism, to its innovations as well as to its reactionary moments," as Clark points out (4).

As "Murder" progresses, this very notion comes under attack. To strengthen the validity of Sophie and Anna's emotional-spiritual bond, the deleterious effects that forms of acceleration have on Sophie's life are dramatized. In the narrative's logic, Sophie's stillborn child is not the reason why she degenerates into a "gaunt woman with lips cut as by steel, with lips moveless as she spoke."[197] Just after this potentially traumatic event Sophie is in fact quite "at peace" and looks optimistically to the future (*City* 37). Her psychological (and physical) state only begins to deteriorate when her significant others (Anna and her husband Victor) speed up their pace of life and, as a result, distance themselves physically and emotionally from her: Anna, now as efficient as a modern mother and household engineer who has her "hands and feet [...] forever at work," begins to feel that "[h]er Love for Sophie was not [longer] *of* her: It stood *upon* her" (*City* 50, 39, emphases added). This phrasing seems carefully chosen: It indicates that the deep-reaching reciprocity, which 'unified' Anna and Sophie previously, is suddenly replaced by a kind of surface-affection on Anna's part. Alienation is the effect.

The portrayal of Sophie's husband meanwhile dramatizes the impact of metropolitan business pioneering on the modern family: Victor, a young clerk who is "full with his ambitious life" and driven by a "hard will" (*City* 37) decides that another attempt at having a baby would potentially hamper his career. As a result, he refuses to engage in any physical intimacy with Sophie and devotes his life completely to the "whirling wheel" of metropolitan business, which "tune[s] him up and away" from her (*City* 33, 49).[198] As evident in these quotes, temporal oppositions ('moveless' and 'gaunt' vs. 'tuned up' and 'forever at work') are used in "Murder" to distinguish the different paces at which Sophie on the one hand and Victor and Anna on the other, lead their lives. In both cases, this sort of desynchronization leads to social alienation.

That the narrative initially identifies Sophie's pace of life as inherently salubrious rather than harmful is striking, indeed. When Anna and Victor accelerate their lives' pace, Sophie retains a relatively slow pace of life which is not in itself morbid. It only becomes injurious when no one remains with whom Sophie could establish the physical or spiritual-emotional 'unity' which such a decelerated state permits. Within this new constellation, Sophie becomes socially and emotionally uprooted, depressed without "purpose and cheer" as well as "cold and still" (*City* 49). Her state, as it is presented in "Murder," resembles "pathological forms of deceleration," as Hartmut Rosa describes in his studies. In *City Block*, however, a "psychopathical depression" is not presented as an "individual (deceleratory) reaction[] to overstretched pressures of acceleration," as in Rosa's sociological classification ("Social" 94). It is portrayed as a new morbid quality, which materializes only if an individual becomes isolated. The moderate pace that once accommodated Sophie's 'unity' with Anna is now but a decelerated, "dull beat" in which she "swings [...] between her emptiness and her friend's [Anna's] fullness. She dwelt nowhere. [...] She was in conflict: a slow dizziness came to live within the eyes of Sophie" (*City* 49). This at once diagnostic and critical portrayal in "Murder" suggests that a societal pace is only 'right' if it allows emotional and physical forms of inter-personal 'unity' to materialize within it.

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[197] Note the way in which the expression 'lips cut as by steel' refutes the positive connotation that man-machine metaphors commonly had in American (visual) culture at the time (cf. Tichi 36–39).

[198] Sophie "needed other seed than the hard will of her husband," she "reached for her man who was hers, who had his hands upon her and his lips. She could grasp nothing" (*City* 37, 49).

The visionary conception of 'positive synchronicity' implied in this notion is advocated by a scene, in which Sophie momentarily overcomes her feeling of physical-emotional isolation: As she sits in a public park, Sophie watches children play and suddenly feels that they "wreathed about her in curves and flares of movement that had her heart for center. They were about her as her feelings within her." They "played, shouted, leaped like particles of light in a concentric rainbow. Sophie sat still in the cold air, feeling their luminous warmth" (*City* 39). The 'natural' rhythm of children's play that these descriptions emphasize ('like particles of light in a rainbow') appears still unaffected by the alienating *Takt* of the metropolis, just as Sophie's pace of life. Due to this synchronicity, Sophie is able to establish a 'unity' between herself and the children: The children's movement has 'her heart for a center,' Sophie feels their warmth within herself and her own feelings within the children. Underscoring the salutary value of such an interpersonal 'unity' based on synchronicity in slowness, the succeeding episode portrays Sophie's suffering in a metropolitan context where no such social synchronization is possible:

> She walked away from a world whose heart she was [...], she walked to her flat.
> She opened, shut the door. She sat in a chair. [...] It was late morning. She did not stir. Sun placed a finger on her foot. His finger rose… It lit the matted hair on her ear. She had not stirred.
> Her husband entered. She did not stir…
> She turned her head, heavy … looked at her man with a look so weighted it took time to reach him. (41)

In his comprehensive 1923 study, Munson observes that an "esthetic of mobility" characterizes Frank's lyric novels (*Waldo* 58), yet a passage such as the above also corroborates Paul J. Carter's contention that Frank's novelistic work "produces something more than titillation, illumination or stimulation: it produces experience" (45). In a quasi-modernist way,[199] the quoted passage compresses a story time of about eight hours (late morning until Victor's return from work) into three short sentences that describe the movement of the sun across Sophie's motionless body. The sentences are short and declarative; they follow the imperative of drastic reduction, employ elliptical structures ('She opened, shut the door'), eliminate narrative mediation and keep adjectives to a minimum. These stylistic attributes, however, do not turn "Murder" into a fast narrative that is blind to the deeper dimensions of life, as Frank claimed 'utilitarian' art was. They evoke Sophie's psychological state: her mental and emotional emptiness as well as the immobility that results from her depression. As they draw a deep-reaching psychological profile, these stylistic attributes enrich the expressive capacity of Frank's experimental prose narrative. At the same time, they mark the novel as one that defies the "*taboo* of an extraverted world against mature experience" – a tendency for which Frank criticized contemporary American art (*Our America* 37).[200] In *City Block*, experiments with literary style are employed to let the reader re-live Sophie's emotional and psychological state. In this respect, Frank's novel diverges from a formally and stylistically fast novel such as *Manhattan Transfer*, which expresses that its "author is sensitive to the ugliness and misery" yet "is never prepared to explore the interior landscape which is the wasteland of the human heart," as Marshall McLuhan claims (141).[201]

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[199] For a comparable 'modernist' example, see Williams' *Great American Novel*, which I discuss in chapter II.C.1.

This strategy to co-opt techniques of textual speed-up can be categorized as a 'liminoid practice,'[202] in Victor Turner's sense of the term. The narrative reveals a "*play* with the factors of [the dominant] culture," here the techniques acclaimed as 'American' and 'modernist,' which aims to "ludic[ally]" appropriate and "defamiliarize" them. As the close readings in this chapter have demonstrate, Frank's narrative is designed to promote "alternative models for living [...] in the direction of radical change" (V. Turner 40). Although some common techniques of textual speed-up come to use in *City Block*, the novel as a whole diverges from the American value of acceleration, which was established in the overarching discourse of acceleration. Frank's novel presents itself as freed "from the normative constraints" of the day in stylistic and ideological terms (V. Turner 44). The hybrid aesthetic in *City Block* does not simply reproduce the *Takt* of the modern world but it evokes the psychological/emotional life of protagonists such as Sophie to promote an alternate, 'unified' model of life. This liminoid approach distinguishes Frank's narrative from many (literary) accounts of American speed and progress that were produced during and prior to the roaring twenties.

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[200] Although Frank's technique here differs markedly from the one Stein employed in her word portraits of Matisse and Picasso, both writers aimed to complete "a psychological analysis of the individual." Quite like Frank, Stein defied other modernist/cubist approaches to representing a person because they "– at least in Stein's view – restricted themselves to the visual representation of the face and the body," as Ulla Haselstein points out (730). In Stein's portrait of Matisse, for instance, "the long and meandering repetitive sentences make sense as intimations of a 'self' characterized by obsessive thought patterns, resonating with self-doubt and exultation following the changing tides of public recognition" (Haselstein 734).

[201] See Edmund Wilson's review of *The 42nd Parallel*, in which he notes that the novel's characters are "presented entirely in terms of *things*" (85).

[202] While Turner's concept of liminality refers to the middle-stage of collective and compulsory rites in small, closed communities, liminoid practices occur in industrial or post-industrial societies, in the arts or entertainment sector.

The dramatic ending of "Murder" reiterates the need for such counter-discursive narratives in modern America. It problematizes that the taboo of emotional experience leaves Sophie's significant others ignorant of her psychological plight and it cautions that an absolute lack of emotional empathy may lead individuals to disastrous actions in extreme cases. The last episode in "Murder" demonstrates that Sophie can no longer contain her violent desire for physical and emotional 'unity' when she is confronted with it in Anna's apartment: "Dominant the bed. Under the arrogant vibrance [sic!] of its quilt lived depths. Sleep of a man and a woman, sleeping and waking together. Birth" (*City* 55). These sentences emphasize that Anna's marital bed represents to Sophie the physical and emotional 'unity' of husband and wife, mother and child, of which her own life is deprived. This confrontation with her innermost desires produces a violent energy in Sophie that leads her to reclaim an experience of 'unity' for herself. As she rocks Anna's crying baby daughter,

> Sophie had no sense of her self separate from this life [the baby] upon her. She had no sense of its shriek above the shriek of her flesh. She folded her arms about the infant and crushed her close, feeling her breasts crush, bruise, feeling her breast swell out and encase the child and the shriek [...], with all her imprisoned self she pressed, that had so long pressed in, what was now sweetly escaping. [...] 'Yes, yes,' she said. And the child's shriek was over. (*City* 57)

This instance of lethal violence is presented as an uncontrolled "explosion" (Munson, *Waldo* 57) that results from Sophie's privation of physical closeness, maternal care and sustenance. Although it seems appalling that Sophie should sit, in the end, "rocking, crooning [...] with wide eyes, wide lips, faintly upturned in a smile" (Frank, *City* 58), the narrative dramaturgy of "Murder" counteracts any moral judgment at this point. This is the case because Frank's narrative traces the problematic process which drives Sophie to such a violent usurpation of physical and emotional intimacy in the first place. In the novel's logic, the title "Murder" does thus not refer to Sophie's final act of violence but to the murder of the 'Person' within her that precedes it.

The close reading of the first two stories in *City Block* demonstrates that Frank's novel is all but a thrilling narrative about the metropolis, which rushes past a sequence of tuned and largely unrelated episodes. *City Block* is not completely adapted to the regime of speed as regards form, style and rhetoric; it is not conceived as a 'word machine' that reproduces the city block as a fictional 'non-place,' to use Marc Augé's term, which exists only "to be passed through" because it is "formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure)" (73).[203] Instead, the stories in *City Block* present the American metropolis as a 'place' across 320 pages. The narrative unflinchingly tells the tales of the people who inhabit it (i.e., the city block) and "moves slowly" from one individual to the next, as the American poet and editor Laura Benét noted in 1923 (94). Experimental techniques are employed in this novel to render a character's psychological state graspable to the reader. Frank's novel thus not only challenges common narratives of American speed-pioneering but it potentially sensitizes readers for the effects of and the possible alternatives to accelerated living.

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[203] Although Augé conceives these non-places as a phenomenon of "[s]upermodernity" because they are a direct outcome of "accelerated transformations," he notes that non-places can be traced back to the modern era, when "entirely new ordeals of solitude directly lined with the[ir] appearance and proliferation" (88).

Religious Doctrines and Their Validity in Modern America: "Faith"

The critical tenor common in leftist or regionalist writings of the age resurfaces in *City Block*, as the readings above demonstrate. At the same time, however, there are strong visionary and spiritual dimensions in Frank's novel that mark it as different from these reactionary responses to modernity. One source of deficiency that "Murder" identifies is, for instance, the fact that modern individuals remain bound by the sacred institution of marriage, even though this deprives them of the possibility to lead gratifying lives and to establish socio-physical 'unities:' Victor, for instance, rejects emotional and physical intimacy with Sophie in order to 'succeed' in the world of business, leaving her alone and desperately unfulfilled. By introducing this change in Sophie and Victor's relationship, the narrative combines a critique of the American 'pioneer type' with an attack on church doctrines. The story "Faith," then, introduces the alternate 'belief' that the sacred institution of marriage is only sacred (and thus binding) if it engenders a veritable emotional and physical 'unity' between two individuals. This controversial creed clashes not only with church doctrines with the norms of the discourse of acceleration, too: It favors an emotional and physical 'unity' of any two people as well as a deliverance from the (accelerant) imperatives of self-restraint and self-negation over a cheerless and vexatious existence in estranged marriage or single life.

"Faith" tells the story of a policeman called Patrick Broaddus, who is unhappily married, as well as of a lonely, unmarried nurse called Paula Desstyn. Paula and Patrick arrange meetings in a rented room to "find out what this is," which has materialized between them during a number of chance encounters in the city block (*City* 81). Endorsing their illegitimate union, "Faith" illustrates the invigorating effect that their 'relation' has on both characters from the outset. The narrative opens with a scene in which Patrick sees Mrs. Luve about renting a room for a private meeting with Paula. This opening dramatizes the positive transformation that occurs once Patrick addresses the issue: "At once he changed" from a serious police officer to "a boy [...] lost in a discomfiture of feeling." The verbalization of his feelings in front of another person ("there's a woman .. I love!") has a liberating effect on Patrick: "Years seemed to flake from him, his eyes were gentler" (*City* 79, 81, 80). As in "Accolade," the reactivation of a city dweller's emotional life is portrayed to have a curative effect: Patrick appears liberated and (physically) rejuvenated.

A passage that appears a little later in the story illustrates the transformative effect which the act of forming and performing an emotional connection with Patrick has on Paula, too:

> She saw herself as she sits very cool in the Park. Her severe straight blue cape falls to the hem of her dress: closely it clings to her nervous shoulders, demurely it flares at the base. [...]
> … Sitting very cool in the usual Park upon a usual day, under a punctual sun. [...] A hard dead uniform, a heavy boot… *This man!* .. The roll of the green hill, the drifting of the air, the press of trees, the play of laughing children .. and herself crumpled, burning in the nearness of this man! [...] Next day, her legs moved back to a bench that had become eternity since a night. Once again a dead dull uniform, thick boots, a magic from them! The Park rose sudden about her like a bowl so that she fell to the bottom of it. (*City* 83)

Images of (emotional) coldness and self-restraint dominate Paula's recollection of her first chance encounter with Patrick: Patrick's uniform seems to her 'hard,' 'dead,' 'dull,' 'heavy' as well as 'thick' and 'severe;' Paula remembers that her own garb was similarly 'severe,' 'straight' and 'demure.' This assemblage of dress attributes matches up perfectly with Paula's bearing, which is portrayed as 'very cool' and 'nervous.' The portrayal of both characters calls up the self-restraint and disaffection that characterizes the American pioneer, as Frank describes him in his non-literary texts and as he appears embodied by Clarence and Victor in the first two stories in *City Block*. Yet this passage from "Faith" illustrates a positive transformation on Paula's part as well: her (emotional) being is brought to life during the encounter with a 'magic' quality that, it seems to her, emanates from the unknown officer.

The cited passage reveals that a generative agenda (i.e., an attempt to promote alternate values and lifestyles) runs through *City Block*: The scene illustrates that Paula's emotional agitation materializes at a point in time when she has decelerated her life's pace. Her recollection occurs when she sits quietly in the room with Patrick. Just as Patrick's exclamation "God, I love her!" during his conversation with Mrs. Luve (*City* 81), Paula's interjection '*This man!*' shows her exhilaration, which contrasts with the emotional coldness that still dominated her being when she first encountered Patrick. Conversely, the quoted passage itself, as a text, seems to 'roll,' 'drift' and 'press' with emotion and vigor, evoking Paula's emotional state when she finally reconvenes with Patrick. Terse phrases, as well as a number of exclamation points and italics, elsewhere employed for textual speed-up at the time, are used for this purpose.[204] Paula's emotional state now appears harmoniously adjusted to the natural world, the 'roll of the green hill, the drifting of the air, the press of trees,' which surrounded her while she was still sitting 'crumpled' on the park bench. In the contrast that is thus created between Paula's former existence and the apparently re-naturalized, harmonious state she has found since a connection has materialized between her and Patrick, an alternate value judgement transpires: Paula's former state is drawn into a negative light while her present, connected state is valorized. The emotional and physical 'unification' of Paula and Patrick, the narrative suggests, will make their modern existences more gratifying and healthier even though it represents an adulterous act.

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[204] In a more traditional narrative, the first two sentences of the second cited paragraph might read like this: She was sitting very cool in the usual Park upon a usual day, under a punctual sun. Then, she suddenly saw a hard dead uniform and a heavy boot that belonged to a police officer, who was passing her.

As the story continues, descriptions of Paula and Patrick's meetings in the rented room perpetuate the appraisal of such a salutary transformation. The passage that presents the moment when Patrick first undresses Paula, for instance, abounds with the imagery of liberation:

> His hands, undressing her, took from her brutally, so sweetly! a gentleness that had been all her life and that now choked her to death. [...]
>
> She lay folded in his arms as he worked, still blind, still frozen. [...] She opened her eyes now, saw him.
>
> With a stillness born miraculously old, she lay down on the bed [...]. She was very still and at ease. She lay as if she had always lain thus, naked. (84)

This portrayal suggests not so much that Patrick's 'work' merely liberates Paula's mind and body from the self-restraining docility ('gentleness') that thus far dominated her chaste single life. Tying in with the previously quoted passages, the formulations used here indicate that Paula's mind and body are restored to a former, allegedly more natural and more perfect state: From a nervous, 'blind' and 'frozen' state of self-denial and -restraint, Paula metamorphoses into a self-assured, contented ('easeful') and unrestrained being who establishes a deep connection with Patrick. Once she lies naturally, 'as though she had always lain thus,' Paula is suddenly able to discern the deeper dimensions of Patrick's being ('saw him').

This account of Paula and Patrick's first private meeting makes it unmistakably clear that a physical 'unification' delivers these two city dwellers from the detrimental habits of self-restraint and self-negation which they have internalized as adapted city dwellers. The ensuing descriptions substantiate this suggestion: "They groped for each other, lost in the impulse of self-preservation. They groped like two weak creatures in a storm who grope for a shelter" and, finally, "won each other. The storm of their passion cased them from the storm of the world" (*City* 86). As it moves an adulterous emotional and physical relationship in a positive light, the narrative diverges strongly from both doctrinal narratives as well as from the discourse of acceleration. It suggests that Patrick's adultery and Paula's unchastity do not represent damnable sins; their shared defiance of blunted affect and what Frank calls 'exteriorization' does not seal their downfall in the modern world. In "Faith," an alternate value system – an alternate faith – is put into place. Refuting widely accepted norms and religious doctrines, the portrayal suggests that emotional and physical intimacy is a legitimate, even salutary act for any modern individual: the alternate force of Paula and Patrick's emotions ('storm of their passion') shelters them from the (normative) forces that engulf them in the modern metropolis ('the storm of the world'). The key to a more gratifying and healthy (i.e., natural) existence, this portrayal suggests, is the liberation from traditional dogmas of Christian faith as well as from the imperative of acceleration, which furthers self-restraint, emotional numbing and alienation in equal measure. Both "Murder" and "Faith" deliver this critical diagnosis and this message, implicitly inviting readers to rethink their own beliefs and behavior accordingly.

An episode that focuses on the lovers' second private meeting, which is included in "Faith" at a slightly later point, reinforces this implicit instigation. It furthermore reframes the latter, adding a spiritual dimension to the idea(l) of a physical 'unity.' This happens, notably, after Mrs. Luve has once again (as in "Accolade") used her ability to "see things, [...] feel things" that others don't see or feel yet. She alerts Paula and Patrick to alternate values of life: deep emotions (i.e., love) and the courage to establish new 'unities' in the modern metropolis. "I know what horror comes, when love is starved or denied," Mrs. Luve proclaims and urges Patrick to "[t]ake her [Paula] out into the sun, where the two of you belong" (*City* 93, 94, 95). As they follow Mrs. Luve's advice, Patrick and Paula experience a 'unity' materializing between them:

> He let himself float with this filament of longing to where she was now, where he saw her, gently his own beside him. He saw life with her, her in his life: they close together and quiet moulding life, making life's form of themselves. It seemed easeful, it seemed needful. It seemed sure like a day dawning.
>
> She with bright eyes felt his new eyes upon her: within her breast that had been hard and cold a warm stream opened. [...] [E]ach pore of her body took him in, he was formed within her. [...]
>
> They came close. For the first time, she placed her hand in his and held it gently. For the first time they smiled at each other in peace. [...] So they sat, looking beyond themselves. (95–96)

The first part of this passage illustrates that a city block resident (Patrick) realizes that there exist a 'unity' between himself, the people around him (here Paula) and the surrounding world: He not only sees Paula in his life and himself within their shared life ('He saw life with her') but he also imagines that they could 'make life's form of themselves.' When the focus shifts to Paula in the second paragraph, this portrayal of three-dimensional 'unity' is replicated: Paula feels herself in Patrick ('she placed her hand in his'), feels him in herself ('her body took him in, he was formed within her') as well as sees that both of them exist within a greater 'Whole' ('looking beyond themselves'). These corresponding descriptions of the bond that love and its consummation forge once again identify the essential features of interpersonal 'unity' for the reader. Similar descriptions appear in "Accolade" and "Murder." Arranged as a sequence, they appear designed to repeat, clarify and re-emphasize the alternate vision of an interpersonal 'unity' so that the reader notices and understands it and is, potentially, even animated to take action herself. Nonetheless, it must be noted that the deciphering of these vague and mystic descriptions still requires a significant analytical effort (and most likely a familiarity with Frank's non-literary writings), which certainly not every reader of the novel will muster. Even if the deeper levels of meaning in "Faith" remain unassessed by the reader, however, the notion that emotional/physical connections may deliver modern individuals from a life of self-restraint and unhappiness will most likely transpire.

The vision that deceleration, physical and emotional intimacy and sociability will become the fundaments of a vision of a community, which runs through *City Block*.[205] At the close of "Faith," it comes into relief: Even though the last lines of "Faith" establish that Paula and Patrick cannot (yet) transfigure the lives they lead beyond the private room, these lines still indicate that "something had happened to them," as Carter observes (50): The nurse and the policeman "got up, and they walked with waking eyes away, into their separate worlds. They did not meet again" (*City* 97). The phrase 'with waking eyes,' suggests that a process of awakening has been initiated in Patrick and Paula – now that their experience of 'unity' has revealed to them an alternate existence in the metropolis. Following the shockingly disillusioned "Murder," "Faith" reveals that *City Block* is critical, yet marked by a generative kind of optimism. Although some of its stories present harsh critical diagnoses of life in urban America, a generative impulse for change materializes in the stories that feature individuals who begin to live according to alternate values and establish emotional and physical 'unities' with others. As the reader later learns, also Sophie has the chance to establish such a salutary 'unity' with Karl Loer, protagonist of the story "John the Baptist," but she does not allow herself to break from her marriage: "No: I am married," says Sophie when Karl approaches her in the street (*City* 44). Moments during which characters liberate themselves from the restrictions of church doctrines as well as from the new American norm of acceleration are moments of hope and 'faith' in Frank's novel.

AN ALTERNATE FORM OF SPIRITUALITY IN "ECCLESIA SANCTAE TERESAE"

The reader encounters such a noteworthy moment in "Ecclesia Sanctae Teresae" – a story that ties in with "Faith." In "Faith," the critique of the 'pseudo-religiosity' that Americans have developed throughout centuries of pioneering is still rather implicit. "Ecclesia" addresses the question of the 'right faith' more explicitly, discrediting conventional faiths (here orthodox Catholicism) in a more straight-forward manner. "Ecclesia" similarly focuses on the Christian maxim of chastity and the sacred institution of marriage yet in this story, the problem in focus is not that appropriated church doctrines reinforce the negative effects of the pioneering lifestyle, as it is the case in "Faith." In "Ecclesia," the reader encounters a critical scrutiny of the doctrinal forms of religious practice which suggests that these have the same impact as a 'successful' synchronization within the metropolitan temporal order. Even though orthodox practices differ greatly from 'successful' metropolitan lifestyles, the narrative makes it very clear that both are equally harmful to the individual. Spirituality, it transpires in "Ecclesia," is only legitimate if it does not deprive its practitioners of the possibility to experience 'unity,' or even spiritual 'Wholeness' in their everyday lives – an experience that materializes when individuals establish an emotional and/or physical 'unity' with other people. "Ecclesia" tells the story of the Catholic priest, Father Luis Dennis, and Clarence Lipper's wife Aimée, who are awakened to an alternate form of spirituality through the 'unifying' experience of adulterous intercourse.

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[205] In this sense, it resembles Anderson's stories "Vibrant Life," published in *Little Review*'s March 1916 issue, as well as "Out of Nowhere into Nothing," The New Englander" and "Seeds," which are included in the collection *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921). See the story "Strength of God" in *Winesburg, Ohio* as well. As Rex Burbank observes, the "sex impulse" is represented in these stories as "the initial step toward breaking the barrier of loneliness" (89).

The first paragraph of "Ecclesia," which is presented as an internal monologue with some authorial interpolations, reveals that Luis is aware of the fact that interpersonal forms of 'unity' are absent from his life as a priest: "My Desire is within me. . He walks toward the Block where is his Church and his home. [...] – Does my desire come because it is Christmas Eve? [...] I am a priest! [...] My Desire is real. You are right to be a priest" (285). The phrases 'I am a priest!' and 'You are right to be a priest' indicate that Luis' belief in the rightfulness of his priestly asceticism is shaken by the natural impulses ('desire') that flare up in him – he even feels the need to re-assure himself that priesthood is a legitimate form for him to exist in the world. The sentences "They [people on the street] who are naught and think naught are in the secret. I who think, am outside" (285), which also appear on the first page of "Ecclesia," moreover emphasize that Luis feels estranged from the metropolitan crowd because he, just as the patron saint of his church, restricts himself to the sphere of the mind instead of seeking salvation in real-world actions and emotions. During the sixteenth century, Saint Teresa of Ávila was, in fact, the foremost proponent of *oratio mentalis*, a form of 'mental conversation' with God and scripture that eliminates physical activity altogether (cf. Riesinger 332). Luis' thinking thus certainly differs from the rationality of the American pioneer or pragmatist[206] but in Frank's narrative, both practices – accelerated living and following the doctrines of orthodox Catholicism (i.e., *oratio mentalis*, asceticism) – are portrayed as illegitimate because they interfere with people's natural impulse to establish interpersonal forms of (emotional/physical) 'unity.'

This unconventional notion is reiterated in "Ecclesia" when Mr. Kandro enters the picture. Kandro is an unmarried member of the congregation in his mid-sixties who has similarly refrained from any 'unlawful' sexual intercourse all his life. Kandro demands an explanation from Luis because he is frustrated by the fact that he has never sinned yet still feels that he is "cursed:" he finds no joy in life (*City* 290). As a character, Kandro has the function to initiate another process of enlightenment in the narrative. Reviewing his own emotions and experiences, Kandro the believer begins to repudiate the teachings of "the Church" as an authorial institution (note the capitalization): "I have been true to my pride [as a Catholic]. And so my hands are red [as a sign of being cursed]? Is that what the Church teaches?" (*City* 291). As the conversation continues, Mr. Kandro challenges the instructions that Luis, as a representative of the Catholic Church, teaches: "'Think! Think,' cried the old man. 'A woman's body [...] is a healing thing we can take whole upon us. It can touch every pore of our aching hungry body. [...] Is it Pride and the love of your Hurt that keeps you also away from the white healing" (*City* 291-92)? Kandro's outburst introduces the notion that an individual who follows the 'rules' of orthodox Catholicism engages as much in a form of deleterious self-restraint as does a 'successful' urbanite such as Patrick or Clarence: He does not allow himself to fill his life with the emotional/physical nourishment ('hungry') which he requires. As Kandro's utterance emphasizes, the pain that doctrinal restrictions inflict upon him has become chronic.

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[206] In *Our America,* Frank scolds pragmatism as another means to "wither any false values" (i.e., those values that he wants to re-establish). In his view, it is a "mere extension of the old pioneering mood." With the advent of pragmatism, Frank explains, "[t]he values of life lose their inherency, become subordinate to the abstract conception of Progress" (27).

After this open attack on church doctrines, "Ecclesia" metamorphoses into an alternate tale of religious enlightenment; a tale that promotes a spiritual practice which is adapted to fulfill basic human needs and desires as well as spiritual ones. An internal monologue, set in italics for emphasis, dramatizes that Luis is struck to the core by Kandro's verbal attack and, after a moment of confusion, concedes: "*What if you have sinned in abstinence more deeply than the lowest lecher? What if I am sinning in my holy state ..* [...] *What of it? Who cares about Sin? Not Christ, surely! Not Saint Paul! Not our holy Mother Church that blots out Sin* [...] *for a candle*" (*City* 293). Luis discredits the binding set of restrictions as well as the logic of sin and redemption, which the authority of the Catholic Church propagates. In this crucial monologue, the priest admits to himself that the Catholic Church treats abstinence and *oratio mentalis* as something holy without warrant and he acknowledges the possibility that an alternate kind of spirituality, in which 'rules' and 'taboos' are based on the believer's innermost needs and desires, has to replace the old doctrinal one so believers can lead a healthier and a more gratifying life.

Not only the stories that precede "Ecclesia" provide support for this spiritual alternative. "Ecclesia" itself contains a final episode that chronicles the ripening of this vision within Luis and illustrates how it eventually frees the priest from the 'real sins' that *oratio mentalis* and life-abnegating chastity actually represent, at least in the novel's logic. Shortly after another mystical scene, during which "Christ rises, still flame, in his [Luis'] eyes," Luis seizes the "healing" that Aimée Lipper represents for him: They engage in sexual intercourse (*City* 297). While Aimée, previously, was only "the taker" of (physical) love, she leaves the church reassured that she has "something now to give to my husband" as well (*City* 297, 299). A long paragraph illustrates that the 'unifying' sexual act enlightens Luis as well, filling him with happiness and harmony:

> The light he had sensed long lancing within his room, burning the lamp, touching the Christ [on his wall] to life, drew him up: he saw whence it came for his eyes where at its source. He stood straight in his room, and he danced. [...] Time was the base of his still feet slowly dancing. [...] He danced. The world swung up and down; calm swinging. (*City* 299)

Luis is engulfed by a purer, more individual form of spirituality that is no longer filtered and (wrongly) expounded by an institution such as the Catholic Church: The divine (light) now meets him directly from heaven and enters his being ('his eyes were at its source'), immersing him completely. The formulations in this passage differ from those used previously in "Ecclesia," where a sentence such as "the light seemed beyond the room: it fell into this shut warm place [...] like a stroke from outside" delineated the distance that existed between the priest and 'the divine' (288). Only after he has experienced a physical 'unification' with Aimée, Luis is eventually sensitized to the spiritual 'Wholeness' of self, the objective world and the cosmos, as the modified diction indicates. The trope of dance furthermore suggests that Luis is liberated and filled with joy in this instance: Just as Clarence, whose arms swing freely after the spiritual encounter, Luis dances a dance that does not follow any standardized routine. Notably, this dance is presented as a decelerated movement: His feet do not only move slowly but his whole body remains in repose ('still').[207] In this manner, the narrative indicates that Luis enters a rhythmical harmony with the 'calm swinging' of the world around him.

Paul J. Carter is right to state that "[i]n his attempt to present sexuality as a sacrament in some of the more complex stories in *City Block*, Frank was not attacking religion but its dogmas" (45). The astounding and often opaque story "Ecclesia" indeed discredits Orthodox Catholicism because it allegedly compels people to lead a life of self-denial and self-restraint – a life that deprives them of their basic human need of physical and emotional 'unity' and makes them unable to experience spiritual 'Wholeness.' More generally, "Eccleasia" suggests that practices opposed to the regime of speed may have similar effects as the acceleration of life's pace. Sexual intercourse finally enables Luis and Aimée to establish a closer connection with their significant others – Aimée with her husband and Luis with God and his congregation: "I shall know that I have sinned" states Luis towards the end, "[b]ut[, an immaterial voice interferes,] you have given! .. words lancing like the light from a far distance. [...] There is no sin" (*City* 299–300). The proposition that runs through "Ecclesia" and through *City Block* as a whole is that modern individuals find "redemption in the flesh because their motives are pure: they are trying to find and develop their spiritual natures, to find a new kind of faith" (P. J. Carter 52; cf. Bittner, *Novels*

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[207] The depiction of dance here contrasts strongly with Kracauer's conception of dance in the modern age. Kracauer argues that the latter "has been transformed into a mere marking of time. [...] If in the earliest eras dance was a cult practice, today it has become a cult of movement; if rhythm used to be a manifestation of eros and spirit, today it is a self-sufficient phenomenon that wants to rid itself of meaning" ("Travel" 66).

67). This very reasoning is essential to the vision which Frank’s novel is designed to convey to its readers.

Although “Faith” and “Ecclesia” have a slightly different focus, the latter underpins the critical trajectory established in the former: Both narratives invalidate the restrictive doctrines of Christian faith. *City Block*’s visionary dimension comes to full relief in “Ecclesia,” where an alternate kind of spirituality transpires in Luis’ acts and experiences – one that is not based on prefabricated rules that have been established by an authority. It is a spiritual state in which rules and taboos are based on believers’ needs and desires. In the novel’s portrayal, such a form of spirituality not only harmonizes the ‘Person’ with the external world. The social and physical ‘unities’ it enables also fills life with joy and wellbeing. Although the novel’s critical focus is momentarily diverted from the nexus of speed and modern life towards orthodox religiosity in “Ecclesia,” parallels between the effects of speed-pioneering and orthodox religious practice are drawn up (yet not clearly spelled out for the reader) in the story, which convey that an alternate spiritual practice can help modern Americans to counteract alienation, disaffection and harmful self-restraint.

SIGNIFICANT CONTRASTS: “UNDER THE DOME: *ALEPH*” AND “UNDER THE DOME: *TAU*”

The close readings of “Accolade,” “Murder,” “Faith” and “Ecclesia” demonstrate that critical diagnoses and alternate visions engender a generative effect in Frank’s novel on two levels: within each self-contained story and in the interplay of two or more stories, when the diagnosis or vision presented in one story is reiterated in another. The latter is also the case in story five (“Under the Dome: *aleph*”) and six (“Under the Dome: *tau*”). These succeeding stories, however, represent an exceptional case. They are designed as a meaningful unity, as the identical first part of their titles, ‘Under the Dome,’ indicates. The first and last letter in the Hebrew alphabet, ‘*aleph*’ and ‘*tau*,’ are used in the second part of their titles, respectively, which implies somewhat vaguely that the two stories represent the opposite ends of a single ‘system.’ The short introductory paragraphs that are printed above the main texts of “*aleph*” and “*tau*,” however, reveal at once that this opposition indicates the degree of spiritual enlightenment which the main characters in each story have attained: “They were two figures under the grey of the dome .. two straight faint figures of back: they were a man and a woman with heads bowed, straight .. under the surge of the Dome.” This introductory paragraph establishes that “*aleph*” offers a dystopian portrayal of two people’s lives under the smothering dome of the metropolitan city block. The attributes ascribed to Meyer and Esther Lanich in this paragraph – ‘faint,’ ‘straight,’ ‘black,’ ‘bowed’ – indicate that these two city dwellers have not found health, happiness or harmony in the metropolis. The paragraph printed at the beginning of “*tau*” draws up a diametric opposition between the two stories: “There was a light shining in the lives of Lotte and Isidor Rabinowich" (*City* 101, 121). Grey dimness is set against light; two faint and nameless figures with bowed heads are contrasted with a literally enlightened married couple. "*tau*," in fact, introduces a city dweller who exists as a 'Person' within the metropolis. The introductory paragraphs express a preference for Lotte and Isidor's existence and they illustrate the strategy of contrasting extremes in one larger prose narrative for the purposes of disillusioning the reader and sensitizing him to the downside of modern urban life, of presenting him with an alternative and, finally, of animating him to take action. This strategy will be identified in *The Office* and *Flamingo* as well.

"*aleph*" is designed to attend to the first of these purposes: it reiterates the critique of human isolation and disaffection, as included in stories such as "Murder" and "Accolade," to foster the reader's critical awareness. The story confronts the reader with a disillusioning portrayal of life "in a world that roared and wailed, that reeled with despair" (*City* 109) – a life strongly reminiscent of the 'pioneer existence' that Frank describes in his non-literary writings. Just as the suits that hang "all pressed and stiff" in the laundry shop they run together, Esther and Meyer's married life is presented as drained of human emotion, intimacy and compassion. The couple has worked these "stiff and dead" suits as well as their married life with an iron that "sucks out" not only their humane essence but also the traces of such basic human acts as "eating" or "loving" – acts that nurture body and spirit respectively (*City* 103). Meyer and Esther's life in the "harsh City" (*City* 109) is presented as devoid of both emotional- and social depth.

All through "*aleph*," there runs a critical diagnostic strand, which comes into view in the way stylistic experiments are employed to evoke the division that exists between Meyer and Esther. The narrative abounds with short sentences that are at once separated and contrasted by a 'syntactical barrier' of one or more full stops: "Her mother [Esther] does not move … Her father [Meyer] does not move;" "Esther sits still. He sews" (*City* 106, 107). For the same purpose, the narrative moves back and forth between a group of paragraphs that relate either Meyer or Esther's thoughts and impressions; it never unites the thoughts of both in one paragraph or sentence (cf. *City* 101-102, 116-117). Thus constructed, "*aleph*" calls up techniques that were employed in other experimental texts of the day to evoke, for instance, a subject's quick mental progression from one aspect or impression to another.[208] In "*aleph*," however, this arrangement is used not to intoxicate or entertain but to 'deepen' the portrayal, to make the disaffection and separation of the married couple tangible for the reader.

For the same purpose, the technique of alternating quickly between different individuals is employed in a scene in which Sophie Breddan (the protagonist of "Murder") enters the laundry shop to collect a suit:

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[208] See for instance my close reading of a passage from William Carlos Williams' *Great American Novel* in chapter II.C.1.

> Eyes met. – She is tidy and fresh and less beautiful, though, than I. She has no child. She has a flat with Sun and a swell husband who wears a swallow-tail and takes her out to parties [...].
>
> – She has a child, and she lets her play dirty with scissors under a tailor table. 'How much is it?' .. After a decent bedtime.
>
> – Does she think I care about this? 'Oh, no hurry. Better come in and pay my – Mr Lanich. Any time.' (Frank, *City* 104)

The alternation between Sophie and Esther's perspectives expresses the antagonism of both women – a form of social animosity that other characters in *City Block* (Clarence, Louis) are able to overcome through spiritual enlightenment. The passage reveals that Esther and Sophie have more in common than they recognize, yet their mutual sufferings remain unuttered: Both struggle with their estranged marriages, their loneliness and their desire for intimacy. The exchange that takes place between these two women consists only of standard politeness formulae, which are *ipso facto* devoid of any genuine emotion or personal dimension. During their encounter, no connection (i.e., sympathy or compassion), let alone an experience of 'unity,' materializes between Esther and Sophie. They stay as neatly isolated from one another as the individual bullet points, which record their thoughts and utterances in this experimental passage.

Although the 'deficiencies' of Meyer and Esther's existence already come into clear relief in the quoted passages, the timely appearance of Lotte Rabinowich (the protagonist of "tau") towards the end of "*aleph*" intensifies the critique – and announces the visionary import of the next story. Lotte comes to the store to pick up her son Herbert, who plays with Meyer and Esther's daughter Flora. The description of Lotte's short visit contrasts with the preceding illustration of disaffection and alienation, thus heightening the portrayal's potential to disillusion readers and to sensitize them to alternatives. "'Excuse me, friends. I was worrying over Herbert … Well, how goes it?' She smiled and stepped into the room: saw them all" (*City* 111). This passage from "*aleph*" reinforces the alternate values promoted in other stories: Lotte is introduced as a caring, approachable and friendly city-dweller; she is equipped with a 'unifying' force: Entering, Lotte identifies Meyer, Esther and herself as a stable social group of 'friends' – a long-grown social affiliation, as the label suggests, that is based on trust and intimacy. By the mere force of her friendly gaze, Lotte transforms the divided individuals before her eyes into a social unity: she 'saw them all' at once. As the story continues, Lotte is stylized as a proponent of sociability, for instance when she encourages her son to openly express his devotion to Flora ("If he wants to [bring Flora toys], he should. It's lovely that he wants to"), kisses her son, "turns the love of her face upon the children" or calls Herbert "[d]arling" (*City* 111, cf. 113).

The contrast between expressed love, emotionality and happiness versus self-restraint, unrequited prudishness and misery is reinforced by the depiction of Esther in this scene: Sitting silently, Esther's recollection that she once saw Henry lift Flora's skirt propels her into a disproportionate state of "fear" and prompts her to imagine that "men with thick lips, hairy hands, [...] will lift her [Flora's] skirt and kiss her. [...] She hated her daughter" (*City* 113). This striking description of Esther's reaction to human sexuality suggests that a main reason for her unhappiness might be her own sexual frustration. Since Esther has evidently pledged herself to the moral imperative of self-restraint and emotional coldness, her jealousy of people who experience love and physical intimacy turns into a form of hatred. This very suggestion reinforces the critique expressed by other narratives in Frank's novel (especially "Murder," "Faith" and "Ecclesia") and it simultaneously underpins the values that Lotte embodies. Constructing a stark contrast between her and Esther, the descriptions in "*aleph*" accentuate that Lotte brings a mood of "great appeasement and of content" into the dark, silent laundry shop. Her gestures of charity meanwhile integrate with the ideal of spiritual 'unity' and social responsibility, which the narratives collected in *City Block* promote (see especially "Accolade"). Noticing Esther's condition, Lotte extends a helping hand and proposes: "'Why don't you come round, sometime, Esther? You know, I should always be so glad so see you'" (*City* 112). Because her soul seems to be "pent" up "as in a case" of self-abdication and withdrawal, however, Esther blocks even this empathetic offer of neighborly kindness (note the phrasing 'so glad to see you'). The stock phrase of rejection "Oh, I am well, Mrs. Rabinowich. Thank you," used by Esther, emphasizes that Esther is unwilling to face the deplorability of her own life (*City* 112). She remains trapped in her unhappy, alienated existence.

"*aleph*" does not provide specific information about the cause of Esther's condition, yet with hindsight to the other stories in *City Block*, a reason might be that the inhabitants of the city block have internalized the norms of the pioneering lifestyle: self-restraint, economy and the evasion of the deep dimensions of life. The stories in *City Block* shed a critical light on this condition, revealing that these norms engender dysfunctionality and suffering instead of producing individuals who function as smoothly as machines. Another suggestion offered in "*aleph*" is that Meyer's orthodox Judaism impacts his wife's condition in a negative way – and here the message of "Ecclesia" is already prefigured. Even though Meyer endorses the alternate values that Lotte promotes when he calls Herbert a "big-hearted boy" who "will be strong and a success" (*City* 113), these values do not inform his own actions: He takes no active measures to re-create his emotional/physical 'unity' with Esther or to save his child from neglect. Instead, he withdraws into silent consideration and prayer. A refuge in inactivity and orthodox religiosity will not enable people to establish a 'unity' with others around them – both "*aleph*" and "Ecclesia" underline this point. The answer to the question "What have I done, Lord? what have I not done?," which Meyer poses on its first page of "*aleph*" (101), is provided by the portrayal in "*aleph*" itself: Meyer has taken refuge in inactivity and orthodox religiosity while he should have felt deeply, communicated openly and loved actively.

While "*aleph*" seems primarily designed to disillusion and to foster a critical awareness, "*tau*" has the function to present the reader with a viable alternative: it is the first story that focuses on an individual who exists as a modern 'Person' within the metropolis. This 'Person' is Lotte, who lives not only in health and harmony within her social and spatial environment but seems aware of a greater 'Whole' of her self, the objective world and the cosmos as well. The introductory sentence indicates that "[t]here was a light shining in the[ir] lives" (121). In *City Block*'s logic, however, this 'shining light' does represent the honor bestowed upon a 'successful' American pioneer, nor does it resemble the blinding flicker of electric light on Broadway, which Frank saw replicated in modern American art that "distracts the eye from the beholding of sources" ("Comedy" 117). The 'shining light' designates the unbroken beam of spiritual enlightenment that appears here and flares up again in the last scene of "Eccleasia." Unlike Luis, however, Lotte is enlightened in a spiritual and in a secular way: She sees through the normative ideology of the day and appreciates the qualities of 'divergent' individuals, who fail in the modern world due to their "ineffectual" and dependent being (like Isidor) or their "strange," "slow," inarticulate and (physically) defunct nature (like her son Herbert) (*City* 121, 127, 127).[209] The first paragraph of "*tau*" emphasizes at once that the Rabinowiches live according to alternate values such as emotionality, compassion and intimacy, which make their shared life harmonious and happy. It introduces Isidor as an individual in whose mind is "lodged [...] sweetness and trust in her [his wife]." Even though he might seem like a "child of a man," Lotte respects and loves him as

> my Man, [...] father of my child. She smiled at him [...] He turned his colorless eyes – he had felt her – upon her. They glistened under her exultation like waters suntouched. 'What is it?' he smiled back, holding awkward a huge cardboard box. 'Come here.' He leaned over the counter. She kissed his lips. (*City* 121-22)

Lotte and Isidor's relation is portrayed as a 'unity' which is based on a permanent emotional bond (love), reciprocal compassion and intimacy ('She smiled … he smiled back') as well as the physical expression of love ('She kissed his lips;' 'he had felt her'). The portrayal in this scene resonates with "*aleph*" because it refutes the conceptions of normality and 'otherness' that dominate Esther. In turn, it legitimizes the 'otherness' of Isidor and Lotte's harmonious 'unity:' Isidor "took his place at her [Lotte's] side" (*City* 122).

As the narrative proceeds, it substantiates the positivity of this sort of 'unity' and 'otherness' in a scene that illustrates that Isidor and Lotte are 'Persons' who live in health and harmony since they are conscious that they belong to a greater 'Whole' of self, external world and cosmos.

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[209] Already in "*aleph*," Esther notices that Herbert drags one foot slightly behind as he walks (108).

> From the West came the Sun in shouting strokes, pried open the cold walls of the Block. The Block grew warm, it opened wide its tremulous walls to receive the Sun … [...] Children pouring from school, bubble and pelt and foam of children within the Block. [...] They were a tide under the open walls, flood of the Sun's long strokes within the walls of the Block … … And the small brown shop, all shadow, the little woman and the little man standing within the shop, within the swelling walls of the passionate street, within the flood of the Sun. (*City* 122–23)

This remarkable passage resembles the opening of *Dark Mother* in the way it describes the fusion of each and every particle in the story world. The numinous light that shines upon Lotte and Isidor breaks the barriers of the city block and fills it with its unifying warmth. Metaphors (rather than similes) signal that the children, who are of the block, completely merge with the strokes of the sun and, in turn, spread the sun's light and warmth. The last sentence finally locates Lotte and Isidor, as distinct 'Persons,' within the greater mystical 'Whole:' Each of the succeeding sub clauses expands the realm in which their existence unfolds (note the repetition of 'within,' which marks this expansion). The last sub clause expresses that Isidor and Lotte's existence is 'one' with the numinous light that unites all earthly things ('within the flood of the Sun'). This portrayal confirms that this couple, unlike Esther and Meyer, lives harmoniously and healthily within a greater spiritual 'Whole.' Furthermore, it shows that Isidor and Lotte have established a permanent 'unity' among themselves, which is based on emotions, compassion and intimacy.

While these passages present the reader with a spiritual, alternate vision of life in the metropolis that emphasizes the merits of 'unity' and 'Wholeness,' the ensuing narrative is designed to foster her critical awareness and, potentially, animate her to take action herself: It does so by laying bare the norm of acceleration and by portraying the regulative forces that drive individuals to rigorous adjustment, effecting that those who do not comply are pathologized. "*tau*" introduces different "Authorities" of the story world who are determined to regulate Herbert because he shows signs of compassion, emotion and spirituality. One is Herbert's teacher Miss Klaar, who comes to see Lotte about her son's "unruly" behavior in class. Klaar is characterized as a 'successfully' adapted American – a "high and stiff" single woman eager for practical exertion (*City* 130, 128) who is vigilant against the threat of "letting the *glow* of this meek strong creature in black [Lotte] impinge on [...] her duty" (Frank, *City* 129, emphasis added). Klaar is identified as one of the authorities who ensure that American children are normalized to 'run' smoothly and efficiently in their modern surrounding. Just as Lotte's spiritual 'glow,' Herbert's behavior prompts Miss Klaar to take regulatory countermeasures: He "does not seem to fit in the regular graded Class," the pedagogue declares, marking him as a divergent child.

In order to officialize this diagnosis and enforce normality in her class, she prescribes that Herbert is examined by the "cold clear eyes" of a medical authority, who finally seconds her verdict: "There is no doubt [...] [that] your son is not only backward, very backward, will never be anything else … [...] just as childish and foolish – and stupid" (*City* 130, 133, 134). The tone taken by the doctor to pass his diagnostic judgment on Herbert's 'condition' disqualifies his diagnosis as neither trustworthy nor objective. Scenes that re-validate spirituality, slowness and emotionality, which precede the scene at the doctor's office in "*tau,*" as well as the section that relates the family's visit to the doctor's office as such have the same function: they are designed to repudiate that officials who uphold modern American norms have any veritable authority on questions of normalcy or health. In the paragraphs that portray the visit to the doctor's office, an omniscient narrator lays bare to the reader that a sense of 'Wholeness' which grows in Lotte undermines the threat of the doctor's diagnosis:

> Their being there, still in the [waiting] room, made them one with the room: they and the room moved onward to a real thing she could not yet see. [...]
>
> She felt how all of the world was about her like her flesh about her heart: how it swung ahead into certainty. [...] God was about her in the certainty of life .. like her flesh. God was of her sitting there and moving there toward the words of knowledge she was soon to receive. [...]
>
> He [the doctor] stepped in to them alone – above white vest, within wide face eyes little and blue, cold and impatient.
>
> Words came .. his words .. words from a Doctor who knows. – Words for my heart of my son: words born of God within cloud of her life… Listen, these words, lay them hot and cold in my open heart which the Sun has opened …
>
> 'I suppose,' he looked down at a card, 'Miss Klaar, I suppose, has prepared you for what there can be no doubt of … No doubt of, my dear people.'
>
> He looked at them … The world is one, these words of a world that is one … (*City* 133–34).

This peculiar passage traces how a reassuring sense of 'Wholeness' gradually materializes in Lotte. While an omniscient voice vaguely describes the 'unity' between Lotte, Isidor and the room in the first paragraph, it relates a divine imparting of knowledge on Lotte's part in the second paragraph: Within her grows the awareness that everything 'about her' belongs to a spiritual 'Whole' that is also 'of her' – and exactly at this point, the narrative takes on Lotte's perspective, as the possessive pronoun 'my' in paragraph four indicates. In this instance, the narrative does not record the medical 'truths' voiced by the 'cold' and 'impatient' doctor but it reveals Lotte's thoughts, which vaguely express her 'spiritual knowledge.' Lotte's thoughts disrupt, even overcast the diagnosis, clashing with the Doctor's 'truths,' refuting their significance: they reiterate the spiritual 'Wholeness' between her family, the world and the cosmos, which abates the import of the medical diagnosis. Ultimately, this 'alternate truth' elevates Lotte above the disease mongering of the doctor and equips her with a spiritual radiance which poses an assault upon the doctor's 'truth' that is portrayed as both powerful and invasive: "The [doctor's] blue eyes gleamed, struck her black calm, came back, tremoring, screaming, within him. His face paled. He turned [...]: he felt behind the daze of his clear rooms a stream of strength moving resistless toward him from this woman: toward daze in himself" (*City* 134). The perplexing scene in the doctor's office presents the prospect that 'Persons' such as Lotte may not only preserve the alternate values of sociability, (emotional and physical) intimacy, and spirituality in modern America. They might additionally play an essential oppositional – perhaps even transformative – role in the spiritual revolution of individual and social life in modern America, as Frank imagined it elsewhere.

The final scene in "*tau*" supports this vision of Lotte's spiritual supremacy and leadership in the modern age: It is with a sense of silent, somewhat triumphant resilience that Lotte walks through the "harsh, staccato, [...] alien" landscape of the metropolis: "No son. There's no hurry," she tells Herbert and thereby ingrains in her son, hence in a new generation of block inhabitants, an alternate set of norms and values.[210] The story ends on a positive note: Herbert happily accepts his mother's suggestion and "leaped ahead, longed behind, glad of this adventure of moving through the city with his mother and father. Both! They walked slow, they walked still" (132).[211] The narratives of "*aleph*" and "*tau*" strongly resonate with one another, yet against Bittner's claim that each couple has "what the other envies: the Lanichs a sound child, and the Rabinowiches a tawdry prosperity" (*Waldo* 69), I set the observation that both stories are designed to re-establish alternate values for modern America – the value of slowness, spirituality, sociability as well as (emotional and physical) intimacy, which the closing lines of "*tau*" emphasize once more. The meaningful unity that "*aleph*" and "*tau*" constitute augments *City Block*'s generative potential, particularly since a critique (in "*aleph*") and a spiritual vision (in "*tau*") are arranged in a way that, ideally, first disillusions the reader about modern life and then presents her with an alternative: the state of 'Personhood,' which enables Lotte to exist consciously harmoniously and happily within a greater spiritual 'Whole' of self, surrounding world and cosmos. The ending of "tau," finally, encourages the reader to follow Herbert's example. Lotte's statement 'There's no hurry' reverberates like a mantra in each story of *City Block*, yet the reader is most directly invited to follow it in this instance – at a point when the transformative, curative potential of slowness and mindfulness, which Lotte's statement instigates, has been amply established.

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[210] *Venture* (1927), the only novel written by the Max Eastman, editor of the leftist magazine *The Masses*, presents a similar situation and vision: That "he [the protagonist Joe] could not talk as fast, and could not think as fast, as his brother [...] caused his mother to pause and look at him with a kind of admiring wonder. [...] It was the first hint he received that he had something in him [...][,] a gift for feeling the qualities of experience. [...] He could feel things better and more accurately than his brother. He was more vividly alive" (2). *Venture* does not qualify as an alternate novel since it is stylistically unremarkable, yet it promote similar values as *City Block*: Jo's "ideal was to depart passionately from all patterns and be himself. While "to be the most exact and perfect pattern, was their [other people's] ideal" (6).

[211] Already on their way to the doctor, they were an obstacle to the city's fast circulatory system: There was a "fateful purpose in the lurch forth of the car that for them had scraped to a standstill" (*City* 135).

FROM SELF-REGULATION TO ENLIGHTENMENT: "JOHN THE BAPTIST"

A similar generative potential can be traced in "John the Baptist," the story that succeeds "*tau*" in Frank's novel. The story's first part introduces an African-American woman by the name of Clara Jones, who sets the protagonist Karl Loer an example of a slower, spiritually enlightened existence in the way she lives. Through an experience of spiritual 'Wholeness' in the story's third (and last) part, during which Karl encounters a reincarnation of John the Baptist, Karl transforms his existence according to this very ideal, setting an example for the reader to follow. To substantiate the validity of such a transformation, "John the Baptist" addresses the problem that individuals such as Karl, who have become accustomed to modern city life, tend to restrict themselves to the non-spiritual sphere of rationality even if this socially alienates and affectively flattens them. Half-way through the novel, the individual who begins to revolt against the norms of modern city life and, thus, enters a state that makes him susceptible to 'the spiritual' is portrayed as the true American pioneer.

The first part of "John the Baptist" introduces Karl as a professional musician; as a man in whom a conflict between modern rationality and disillusioned emotionality rages. The narrative dramatizes Karls' inner strife between his habit of acting according to the common norms (rationality and synchronization) and his desire to slow down to gain access to his feelings. At the outset, Karl is alone in his room, delving in recollections of Sophie (protagonist of "Murder"), whom he has repeatedly noticed on the streets of the block. The narrative is focalized through Karl in this instance, revealing his impression that there is "an iron bar, clamped hard and close, across the breast" of this woman (*City* 143). The narrative contains no explanation for Sophie's state, no reason why she appears "clouded in dark glow" to Karl. It nonetheless illustrates that this mere recollection triggers in Karl a rebellious attitude: "His mind out there beats against her uprightness: his mind is a sea beating and breaking against her [...] – availless" (*City* 142, 142-43). Although the reader is informed that Karl's mental attack is not strong enough to free Sophie from the fetters of her injurious self-restraint, these lines reveal to her that a readiness to engage in rebellious, liberating activity emerges in Karl.

The re-validation of slowness, initially launched in "Murder," represents a concomitant generative strain that runs through the first part of "John the Baptist." It surfaces in passages such as the following: "His mind held away no more. It broke forward. It leaped, it sang: his fingers moved with delicate precision making *slow* music" with his cello (142, emphases added). This description indicates that Karl is liberated in two crucial respects: for one, he produces slow music, thereby defying the speed-imperative. Secondly, he lets his mind leap back in time to past *Erlebnisse*. Although his mind appears animated, 'breaking forward' and 'leaping,' it engages in an essentially retroactive, yet generative activity which aims to create *Erfahrung* and memory rather than progress. Since this playing of slow music, this kind of critical retrospection awakens a revolutionary potential in Karl, the scene illustrates to the reader quite plainly the merits of such a performative and mental emancipation from the imperative of speed.

The first part of "John the Baptist" moreover illustrates that such moments of resistance are exceptional in Karl's daily life because he is for the most part unable to act counter to the norms he has internalized. The merit of active resistance, thus, becomes even more prominent. In an impulse of self-regulation, Karl suddenly terminates his positively liberating reflection[212] and suppresses the rebellious thoughts he has just allowed to materialize: "this is what comes of music .. of emotion," Karl says "aloud with an emphasis [...]. Idiotic ideas .. visions. That woman .. what do you know about that woman" (*City* 144)? This passage suggests that modern individuals such as Karl have internalized the norms of repression and self-restraint to a degree that makes it almost impossible for them to develop a divergent attitude. The reason is that they regulate themselves, as Karl does in the quote. Karl, the modern American momentarily gone astray, forces his attention away from the recollection that fosters a defiant attitude in him. He instead directs it toward the 'safe' world of scientific rationality: He opens a book on psychology that is positioned next to seminal works of evolutionary theory, anthropology and modern pragmatism on his bookshelf ("Spencer's *First Principles* … *Introduction to Anthropology* … Dewey's *How We Think*"). In this instant, Karl raises his regulatory voice against himself once more, trying to mute his divergent thoughts: "'Here's the place for your mind,' he said aloud" (*City* 142, 145). A similar situation occurs at a later point in the narrative as well, whereby the impression is created that self-inflicted regulation has become a habitual practice for the urbanite Karl: This time, Karl passes Sophie's husband in the street, and, as though automatically, his "mind reached for the surety of his mantel and of its row of sober books. [...] Look at her [Sophie]! Take away the bar! place your arms there! .. he returned to the house he lived in. [...] His mind, he was very sure, was master now" (147). The suggestion is clear: Each time Karl's emotions threaten to unsettle him, each time he longs to replace self-restraint with emotional and physical closeness ('Take away the bar! Place your arms there!'), he compulsively regulates himself and resorts to the 'safe' world of rationality. As it thus draws the reader's attention to the fact that the norms and imperatives of the day prevent 'normalized' Americans from embracing their emotions and from engaging in critical, generative ways of (retrospective) thinking, "John the Baptist" works toward a goal set by Van Wyck Brooks in 1917: American narratives "have to create a respect for experience, a profound sense both in their audience and in themselves" ("Splinter" 280).

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[212] Frank celebrates such a state of self-aware deceleration in *Our America* as well, where he praises that Alfred Stieglitz "was in no hurry. He swept back perhaps twenty years: phase over phase his words rolled on, careful, clear [...]. And with the silence, you found that he had given you no brittle point, no isolated intellectual opinion: but an experience of life in which such points and such opinions were trivial details" (185).

Bittner is right to state that "John the Baptist" revolves around the fact that Karl "has no spiritual roots and is unhappy at the lack" (*Waldo* 66), yet the scholar fails to describe the strategies that are employed in the narrative to draw the reader's attention to this very fact and to pin down for him what kind of spirituality will be able to deliver Karl. Starting out with the suggestion that an existence devoid of emotional and spiritual *Erfahrung* brings Karl nothing but "desolation" (154), "John the Baptist" is a narrative that has the reader trace Karl's spiritual awakening. The passages that introduce the character Clara Jones, a spiritually enlightened African-American woman who cleans Karl's room, invite the reader to recapitulate all the elements that define a modern 'Person,' as they are introduced in previous stories.

> She worked slowly, diligently [...]: as if an invisible Master timed her work with gentle strokes on her bent back. [...] At times a murmur as of words answering in herself, a shred of tune came from her. And these were in unison with the rapt measure of her work. And it with the distant fixedness of her eyes that moved as if to remain fixed upon some point either far within or far without herself… (*City* 139-40)

This passage once again presents spirituality as an alternative to Karl's life of loneliness, discontent and inner strife. In great detail, it pinpoints the positive aspects of Clara's religiosity: Her life proceeds at a decelerated pace, which enables her to attend to her work with remarkable care and attention ('diligently,' 'rapt'). Notably, this pace of life is similarly decelerated as the pace into which Karl allows himself to lapse while playing his cello (see above). Although the diction emphasizes that Clara works hard ('bent back'), the overall portrayal in the quoted passage reveals that the alternate (spiritual) pace, which an immaterial force sets for her, is as ultimately soothing as it was for Anna and Sophie in "Murder" ('an invisible Master timed her work with gentle strokes on her back'). While she works, Clara seems at ease and happy. She hums a tune and communicates with her inner self ('a murmur as of words answering in herself'). Another important dimension to which the portrayal draws attention is that Clara appears to be emotionally and spiritually centered on a 'fixed point' that connects her self with a spiritual element beyond her. Through this portrayal, the reader is again presented with an exemplary 'Person' who actively but slowly transfigures the multiverse into a 'Whole:' The 'Person' Clara lives happily and harmoniously in the awareness that her existence evolves within a greater spiritual 'unity' of self, physical world and cosmos.

"John the Baptist" features another scene about Clara which illustrates that repetition is one of the strategies used in the novel to sensitize the reader to the elements that distinguish the ideal modern 'Person.' This time, this process is presented through Karl's perspective, which lets the reader witness the moment during which the protagonist first becomes aware of the 'unity' that exists between Clara's self, her surroundings and the cosmos. After he has spent some time turning back and forth between emotions and self-regulation in his room,

> [h]is feet led him into Clara's kitchen.
>
> She was alone. An ironing board was laid from table to low shelf. He saw her back. A bent old back .. a small round head .. a mass of towsled hair .. dusted with white. [...]
>
> He tiptoed in, sat down and watched her. The rhythm fleshed ... A naked woman, tall and firm and glowing like red earth. Her hands were above her head. Her hands were flowers with the wind in them. There was a tree above her. And her long bare feet, with the straight toes, were somehow intertwined with the tree's roots. (148)

The quoted passage confronts the reader with a spiritual 'reality,' which becomes accessible to Karl once he sits down and watches Clara. At this moment of repose, he realizes that Clara's body, natural and 'naked' just as Paula's body in "Faith," is 'one' with the world around her: her body is of the same color as the ground; her hands are flowers moved by the wind; her toes intermingle with the roots of a tree. The imagery in this passage reveals that the white American Karl is yet unable to divorce his exoticist perception of the African American woman from the mystical, racially unspecific state of 'unity' he discerns in this situation. His exclamation "Nigger woman .. you are all *one!*" (*City* 149), however, reveals that Karl has recognized that Clara is part of a greater 'Whole.' Evidently, the first part of "John the Baptist" not only problematizes that modern individuals are often their own worst enemies when it comes to acting upon their desire to slow down and to overcome their desolate loneliness. A series of passages that lay bare the spiritual dimensions of Clara's existence furthermore potentially sensitize the reader to the fact that the 'Person' Clara, who lives consciously within a spiritual 'Whole' and has established a 'unity' between her innermost self, the physical environment and the cosmos, lives more harmoniously and happily because she does not subject her life and mind to the shackles of rationality and self-restraint.

The remaining pages of "John the Baptist" are designed to promote the values that Clara embodies: slowness, spirituality and liberty. Part two chronicles Karl's escape from the imperatives of speed and rationality into "pure air" after he has witnessed the spiritual state in which Clara exists (*City* 152); part three illustrates that he is eventually initiated into such a state through an experience of 'Wholeness' himself. The second part of "John the Baptist" opens with a description of Karl's working environment: He plays "sentimental music .. grime German and Italian soil, froth and scum of Broadway" in a daily show at a German beer hall to "idle eyes that took in so little, moist mouths, distended bellies that took in so much" (*City* 151). During a break, Karl simply walks away from the unfulfilling tedium of endless commercialized performance; from the "hard loom of the Hall, the coldness of men and women abject before their senses, [...] [and from] playing this parody of life for an unreal living" (*City* 152). Karl's escape is presented as a logical result of his growing disillusionment as well as his newly-gained awareness that there are alternate forms of existence that fill people's lives with emotion, meaning and happiness again.

As the story continues, however, the narrative stresses that an act of defiance alone (i.e. the escape) does not completely liberate Karl:

> But he walked still through desolation. He sensed how he walked swiftly. Indeterminable houses were a heavy fluttered Canopy that passed him: banners they were of some arrogant Dominion, dragged through mud, stiffened in frost. They shut him out. [...]
> His knees and chin thrust forward. From waist to shoulder he tended back. So he walked.
> He walked through his life. He ached as he walked through his life. (*City* 154)

Notably, a striking temporal focus marks this description of Karl's behavior after his escape from the beer hall: Quite like Clarence in "Accolade," Karl is still driven to a high pace by a force of habit. He accelerates his step to a swift movement, yet now, he is critically aware that he does so ('He sensed how he walked swiftly'). At this point, such a critical awareness registers in the narrative itself, which now emphasizes that the rapid movement deforms Karl's body: just as Clara, he has a bent back ('From waist to shoulder he tended back') but in Karl's case, this posture is presented as an effect of swift walking that inflicts pain ('He ached'). This portrayal once again challenges the imperative of acceleration and validates slowness. The first paragraph of the quoted passage substantiates this by means of criticizing the impact of city planning that is oriented toward speed and efficiency: The block of high-rise buildings, as a 'fast' urban structure, seems to aggravate social alienation and misery because it is a solid and impenetrable ('shut him out,' 'stiff'), yet fleeting and insubstantial ('Canopy,' 'banners') manifestation of modernity's temporal 'Dominion.'

In departure from this critical portrayal of synchronized city life, the third part of "John the Baptist" demonstrates to the reader that Karl's quick prayer "'Oh God, let me find *something*–'" (*City* 154) can work wonders, even in the modern metropolis. A visionary tale of enlightenment ensues: Karl suddenly enters a natural enclave in the industrialized city, a "scanty stretch between the loom of the streets of men and the black tumult of the River," where, finally, "stillness came within him" (*City* 156, 157). The park figures as an ultimate counter-site to the urban space: It is a 'natural' place where an evidently soothing, decelerated rhythm still rules, fills Karl with 'stillness' and neutralizes his reflex to regulate his own 'divergent' behavior. As in "Accolade," a spiritual encounter takes place once the protagonist decelerates his pace of life, yet since Karl has already been sensitized for the alternate ideal, he is not merely awakened to the 'true' values of life or liberated (physically) from the dominance of industrial *Takt*, as it was the case with Clarence. In the presence of John the Baptist, Karl has an experience of spiritual 'Wholeness' which initiates him into a state of 'Personhood.' At the outset of part three, however, the narrative initially details how Karl begins to experience the 'unity' of self, natural world and 'the spiritual:'

> The sky was steadfast and still: the river was dense and still [...]. The park swayed under the stillness of sky and water. Its swaying was a word that came from moveless lips, its swaying

> was a word of stillness issued from moveless lips. Three horizontal strokes, in the eyes of Karl, of a world that did not move.
>
> Stillness came within him.
>
> He turned his head from side to side, as within steadfastness, not stirring. He saw no more, no less by turning his head. He was within a Focus where all was steadfast and where stillness was all.
>
> [...] He felt how the world swung with him [...]. There was ease in his soul which took each happening and put it away and knew that all was one. (*City* 157-58)

While he sits still on a bench, Karl feels that he is part and particle of the natural world that surrounds him. First, Karl notices that the sky, park and river share a common proper time – a 'stillness' and a 'swaying' movement – which appears considerably slower than the pernicious 'fluttering Canopy' of the city. All three natural elements exist in a synchronized, comparatively decelerated state: the colon in the first line creates an analogy between air and water; the array of attributes from the semantic field of slowness ('still,' 'moveless,' 'steadfast,' 'swaying') indicates a 'unity' between earth, water and air on the level of content. The line 'Stillness came within him,' set apart as a one-line paragraph, carries a crucial duality of meaning: For one, it proposes that the 'unified' natural world enters Karl's being from without, yet it equally suggests that stillness emerges within him as he watches the natural scenery. This duality enhances rather than weakens the suggestive power of the phrase as both possible meanings call up the descriptions of 'unity' which appear in other stories. It thereby puts extra emphasis on this visionary state. Just as Clara, Karl now feels that he exists in the midst ('Focus') of the greater 'unity' that, he 'knows,' extends beyond but also penetrates his own being: the 'three horizontal strokes' are also 'in the eyes of Karl.' The last sentence finally indicates that Karl has entered a new existential state: he is full of relaxation and happiness.

As the obscure narrative in "John the Baptist" continues, it adds the final 'stroke' to Karl's outlook; a 'stroke' of spirituality that distinguishes Karl as an enlightened 'Person:' a "stroke, perpendicular to the three-fold stroke of Park and River and Sky. A stroke cutting along and lifting a veil before his eyes. The movelessness of Life won by this fourth stroke [...] another dimension still" (*City* 158). The complex, almost recondite descriptions that now abound in the narrative only vaguely suggest that this 'fourth stroke' might be the spiritual-social dimension of Karl's present *Erfahrung*. For a reader who is unfamiliar with Frank's critical writings, however, these descriptions might very well remain undecipherable.

Frank's theoretical writings emphasize that an experience of 'Wholeness' always entails a social dimension. "John the Baptist" conveys this idea as well, albeit vaguely, as it portrays how a number of rather bizarre men approach Karl as he sits on the bench[213] and how a 'unity' materializes between Karl and each of these men. Labels such as "Theophilius-Karl" or "Martin-Karl," which are used in the narrative, indicate linguistically that a 'unity' between Karl and each of these men has materialized (162).[214] At the same time, however, the hyphen underlines that each individual in the 'unity' remains distinct: it both connects and separates. The deciphering of such cryptic descriptions of 'unity' is only feasible for Frank's reader at this point because other stories in *City Block* have already (more or less explicitly) introduced the concept of 'unity.'

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[213] One of these men, for instance, picks up the refuse from underneath the benches in the park and eats them.

In a similarly puzzling and extensive manner, the decelerated moment during which Karl finally experiences 'Wholeness' is rendered: All the men "joined hands. And they danced. All danced .. moveless in Karl sitting upon the bench beside the bearded tramp.. [...] A row of houses swung into the Park and the Park swung into the river: and the river suddenly straightened upward and thrust like a lance, quivering white, to the Sky" (*City* 163).[215] These rather cryptic lines once again relate an instance during which a modern urbanite, here Karl with his "four-stroked vision" (*City* 160), has an experience of 'Wholeness' that initiates him into a state of 'Personhood.' Karl becomes one with the social and physical world around him, (the dancing men; river, park and air) as well as the celestial sky above him. As in "Accolade," a spiritual apparition causes this experience: In the last line of the story, the bearded tramp who sits beside Karl declares: "I am John the Baptist" (*City* 165).

In a world in which "life [...] is so completely industrialized that the capacity for spiritual initiative has been all but bred out of it" (Brooks "Toward" 542), as *Seven Arts* critics claimed in unison, Frank's novel portrays the return of such a capacity: In "John the Baptist," Karl is awakened to alternate values as well as to spiritual dimensions of modern life. He escapes from an essentially injurious state, seizing an alternate existence. The latter unites his self, the physical-social world that surrounds him as well as the spiritual sphere beyond in a harmonious 'Whole.' Although the descriptions in "John the Baptist" are extremely complex and often vague, they present the spiritual vision that runs through *City Block* once more to the reader. The narrative revisits many of the critical diagnoses and alternate ideals that previous stories introduce and it chronicles Karl's long way toward 'Personhood.'

AT THE END, A NEW BEGINNING

Upon her first encounter with Frank's novel, a reader accustomed to either popular or avant-garde narratives from the modern era will be, with all likelihood, taken aback by *City Block*'s complexity and peculiarity. She might be prompted to search for the grounds on which the novel, as the introductory comment claims, represents 'a single organism.' The first thirteen stories in

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[214] The following passage stresses the same: "Men sat on benches as he sat upon a bench. Men had feet on a pavement as he had feet on a pavement. Men had faces written with thought as he had a written face" (*City* 158).

[215] As in "Ecclesia," the trope of the dance here signifies the 'Person's' feeling of joyous liberation from the stunting restrictions of the imperatives in a spiritual state.

City Block are designed to facilitate this process. They feature a number of built-in mechanisms that keep the novel's meaning in check: They include similar critical diagnoses of modern city life and they introduce individuals who have either already found or are in the process of finding an alternate, healthier and more gratifying existence, thereby promoting a set of alternate values and animating the reader to change as well. Here, the generative agenda that marks *City Block*'s conception comes into relief. However, it is equally important to note that the stories in *City Block* represent exceptionally complex narratives that give the air of being conceived according to an underlying compositional scheme but often convey, too, the impression that the vision they are designed to promote is still only in the making. If one story reinforces another story's meaning because it addresses a similar topic or offers an analogous description of 'unity' or 'Wholeness,' it always does so in a manner that requires a considerable amount of analytical work. Consequently, it is unclear whether the first thirteen narratives in *City Block* enable readers who are unfamiliar with Frank's non-literary texts to grasp what the 'single organism' is. The complex and vague manner in which *City Block* presents its critique and its spiritual vision – not only its counter-discursive conception – might have been an obstacle to its success in modern America.

In a remarkable way, the very last story in *City Block* appears constructed to approach these shortcomings and to counteract this feasible effect. "Beginning" presents itself to the reader as a meta-commentary on the novel's conception which is designed to compensate for any lack of guidance in the thirteen stories that precede it. On the first two pages of "Beginning," a nameless first-person narrator relates how he "seized" the author of *City Block*, an individual tortured by his own sense of failure in the urban lifeworld,[216] and told him to "Go away [...] into some quiet" to compose a prose narrative which conveys a specific 'message' in an effective way. "I have delivered myself through him," the first-person narrator proclaims (303, 303, 304, 304). Although the meta-comments opening "Beginning" expound that the stories in *City Block* have been 'delivered' by an anonymous author, they do not disclose the identities of the first-person narrator and *City Block*'s author. The personal pronouns 'I' and 'he' are the only indicators provided to the reader that two 'individuals' were involved in *City Block*'s conception. Some scholars argue that the 'I' is Paulo Benati, the first-person narrator of the second part of "Beginning," while 'he' is the author of the stories, Waldo Frank himself (cf. P. J. Carter 53; Munson, *Waldo* 50). Since there is a clear break between the introductory passage of "Beginning" and the story told by Paolo Benati, which is indicated by a line of dots in-between two paragraphs, however, it seems more likely that the 'I' designates some sort of "religious creative consciousness," as Bittner suggests (*Novels* 74). As a first-person narrator, this personified 'consciousness' explains that it has at last "found him," Paolo Benati, "rightly" and has "used" him, just as a ventriloquist's dummy, to "tell about myself, place myself where I belong among these lives that have born me" (*City* 303, 303, 304, 303). These cryptic comments suggest to readers that a spiritual consciousness is trying to reveal itself to them through the stories that Paolo has written for *City Block*; that this very consciousness attempts to establish itself not only within the story world but also within the reader's lifeworld. This complex reader address in the opening of "Beginning" seems designed to convey, albeit once again rather cryptically, that only a proliferation of a 'spiritual consciousness' will transform the modern crowd of isolated individuals (within and beyond the novel) into a 'conscious people.'[217]

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[216] "He said to himself: 'I am a failure. I am of those sacrificed and consumed'" (*City* 303).

The second part of "Beginning," in which the Italian immigrant Paolo Benati suddenly becomes the first-person narrator, illustrates how a story looks if it is told by a 'Person' who has grown sensitive to the true values of life. The narrative differs from all the other stories in *City Block* not only because it is an autobiographical first-person narrative, thus a backward-directed tale of remembrance. The narrative moreover dispenses with stylistic or narratological experimentation/economization altogether. Paulo's story is a thoroughly backward-directed, decelerated and conventional narrative. At the outset, the narrator introduces himself ("My name is Paolo Benati") and then delivers the tale of his life through an unambiguously phrased, linear and coherent narrative (304). Paolo's story thus appears thoroughly un-modern: It presents an elongated moment of introspection, a stylistically unremarkable memory-tale of enlightenment rather than an experimental panorama of modernity that rushes from thrill to thrill. Paolo's tale addresses this new 'reality,' specifically its temporal nature, yet the account of his arrival in New York and his work in a shop that "hummed like a machine moving, crowded with force to move" (*City* 310) is not adapted to this very 'reality' in stylistic or formal terms.

A spiritual encounter that alerts the reader once again to the spiritual nature of *City Block*'s vision is the centerpiece of Paolo's tale. Not a re-incarnation of a prophet or Jesus himself appears before him but a "silver whisper" approaches Paolo at night, urging him to become aware of his own self, his emotions ("what are you? what do you feel?") (*City* 313). This 'whisper' opens Paolo's eyes to a deeper level of 'knowledge/consciousness' about himself and the world around him, as the following passage from "Beginning" reveals: "In these hours I knew the stories of the men and women who came and whose shoes I shined. In these hours I felt their stir, their clamoring word. I felt the rent of pain that was each voice of their hearts" (313). With these emotionally charged, almost chant-like sentences, Paolo's enlightened state is conveyed to the reader – a state in which the first-person narrator perceives the 'unity' of the block's inhabitants. Once again, Frank's narrative draws attention to the fact that such an alternate outlook may put people at unease in a world of speed, yet as in "John the Baptist," the protagonist recognizes the need for such an alternate outlook: "I knew that it was ill," Paolo reflects, "but that it had to be" (*City* 313).

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[217] In many ways, the mechanism used in the last story of *City Block* compares to the first metafictional story of Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, which introduces the writer of the so-called "Book of the Grotesques" as an individual who has observed that "the figures that went before the [his] eyes [...] had become grotesques" (5). Frank's story cycle differs from Anderson's, however, in that it relates the alienation that its characters share explicitly to the conditions of modern city life and proposes a solution for this problem.

At the end of "Beginning," hence after Paolo has fulfilled his destiny of writing and uniting the stories of *City Block*, Paolo commits suicide because he realizes that he cannot overcome the "apartness" that exists between himself and his significant others in the city (*City* 316). Nonetheless, Paul J. Carter is right to state that the end of *City Block* represents "a beginning in the sense that [...] other lives will appear to ask the same questions that Paolo asked and [] struggle for Wholeness" (53). As the nameless first-person narrator proclaims on the first pages of "Beginning," the stories Paolo writes about the 'unity' of the block's inhabitants are indeed supposed to function as a kind of generative 'silver whisper:' They are designed to uncover the downside of modern life, present alternate values and lifestyles and thereby animate the reader to transform her life as well.

Quite adequately, Jerome W. Kloucek observes that "Beginning"

> is a prologue appearing as epilogue for the very reason that the novel's central theme is a vision which is never explicitly stated but which must grow in the reader's own consciousness [...] and a prologue carrying a statement of this theme can be better understood by a reader at the end. (qtd. in Carter 52-53)

Kloucek is right to suggest that *City Block*'s influence on the reader will be, most likely, more permanent and profound if the reader gradually develops a critical awareness and understands the vision of a conscious American people (i.e., a nation of 'Persons') through active deduction rather than induction. Kloucek is equally right to suggest that the function of "Beginning" within the novel is to control *City Block*'s overall message. Although I contend that the overly cryptic nature of "Beginning" once again considerably complicates this, I agree that it invites the reader to re-read *City Block*'s 320 pages. "Beginning" stimulates the reader to trace, once again, the element that links the preceding stories and it invites her to reflect actively upon its vision rather than to put Frank's novel aside immediately in exchange, perhaps, for a shorter, less complex and more entertaining text. As an early reviewer of *City Block* put it, "[o]ne will wish to re-read these stories, and continue to enjoy them and to learn" ("*City Block*. By Waldo Frank").

As I read and re-read the forgotten novel *City Block* almost a century after it was first published, I can understand why it "puzzled, irritated, stimulated" but "seldom enthused" modern readers (Frank qtd. in Trachtenberg x). Indeed, I find it only reasonable that critics have not placed Frank among the ranks of those avant-gardists who have been canonized as American modernists, for instance Williams and Moore. Neither Waldo Frank as an American avant-gardist, nor *City Block* as a modern American novel complied with the distinctive criteria of literary modernism that these and other writers as well as early critics in the field instituted throughout the first decades of the twentieth century. As the present study demonstrates, however, the 'otherness' of Frank and his novel(s) does by no means diminish their significance in the literary and cultural history of modern America.

The first part of this chapter has demonstrated that Frank made himself into a modern American author of a different kind through the way he operated within the discourse of acceleration. Frank expressed his counter-discursive stance in programmatic texts and he sympathized with various positions of the day, among them cultural conservatism, Marxism, spiritualism and what he (and others) regarded as a prominent variant of 'American literary modernism.' Frank's position was marked by a flexible in-betweenness, a 'disillusioned optimism' rather than by any stable association.

City Block occupies a similarly conflicted position within the field of modern American letters, as my close readings in the second part of this chapter demonstrate. The novel defies the "newness, brevity, clarity, and, above all, [the] lack of connection between the individual news items" that both Frank and, later, Benjamin identified as a trend in modern (quasi-)journalistic literature (316). An aesthetic of in-betweenness characterizes *City Block*. The novel combines stylistic experiments with conventional elements such as sentimental tropes and tales of spiritual enlightenment. *City Block* includes 'stories' in the sense that Benjamin defines the term in his essay on Charles Baudelaire: "A story does not aim to convey an event per se, which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds the event in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening" (316). In the age of speed, *City Block* presents itself as a modern experimental novel that imparts *Erfahrung*. It is designed to make readers pause at times, to make them reflect upon the events and meanings in the fourteen stories as well as in their own lives. Thereby, Frank's novel invites them to transfer 'reading *Erlebnisse*' into *Erfahrungen*. This process is facilitated by *City Block*'s composition: Each story in Frank's novel appears designed to further a sense of empathy with the characters featured within it, especially when it uses experimental techniques of textual speed-up to express psychological states. With its hash critique of modern individual- and social life in metropolitan America, *City Block* moreover implicitly seconds (or anticipates) the diagnoses presented by prominent sociologists such as Georg Simmel or Louis Wirth, the latter of which wrote in 1938 that "bonds of kinship, of neighborliness, and the sentiments arising out of living together for generations under a common folk tradition are likely to be absent or, at best, relatively weak" in the metropolis ("Urbanism" 12). Frank's novel, however, is conceived to present a re-integrated whole of fourteen personal histories and identities, even if the connecting element is the spiritual and emotional emptiness they share.

The generative agenda of *City Block* registers in the way it promotes an alternate conception of 'failure' and 'success' by sensitizing the reader to the detrimental effects of speed. The fourteen stories problematize the ideology and imperatives that emerged within the overarching discourse of acceleration at the time and they endorse characters who turn against these. "Murder," "*tau*" and "John the Baptist," for example, criticize that individuals are not only driven to abnegate their emotions and desires within this discourse but are even pathologized if their actions do not immediately serve the purpose of self-optimization and acceleration. Other stories in *City Block* additionally challenge (orthodox religious) practices that ban sexual passions from people's lives (see "Murder," "Faith," "Ecclesia"). With all of these stories, *City Block* reinvests slowness, spirituality, emotionality and (physical) love with value, thus animating the reader to do the same.

While the critique in *City Block* and Frank's non-fictional writing is rather perceptible, the vision of an alternate modern life generally remains rather obscure. Frank put much effort into explaining and developing his vision in a remarkable number of critical texts. Similarly, many stories in *City Block* present and represent his spiritual vision. Since the numerous illustrations as well as the long explicit 'explanations' Frank provides are complex and obscure, however, the reader needs to apply a considerable amount of analytic work to decipher them. At times, however, it seems that even such an endeavor leads to a dead end. Frank's non-literary writings and the stories in *City Block* leave much in the open: How exactly can an individual reach the state of 'Personhood' on his own accord?[218] How can a conscious people (i.e., an organic spiritual organism) ever emerge if people who live alternate lives (such as Lotte and Herbert) are pathologized and regulated within the overarching discourse of acceleration? Is it not too optimistic to think that the small number of people who begin to appreciate the 'true' values of life will triumph in the age of capitalism? How exactly is "the machine [to] [...] become a means toward this wholeness, a means of fusing his [the pioneer's] control over nature with his control over self" (Frank, "Re-Discovery" 43)? Since neither Frank's vast amount of critical writings nor the complex stories he includes in *City Block* establish clarity, I concur with John Jocelyn, who proposed already in 1932 that the "distaste for his [Frank's] philosophy or his style" was often "based on lack of understanding of his purposes as well as [...] impatience with his mode" (413). It took the often boastful Frank another twenty-seven years to admit publicly in *The Nation* that he "do[es] not know how this changed attitude [in the individual] will enact its magic in American life" ("American" 171).

Looking back on the readings conducted and the conclusions drawn in this chapter, I wish to re-emphasize how profoundly the ongoing revisionary work on forgotten authors such as

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[218] The novel illustrates in a rather inconclusive way how some inhabitants of the city block are transformed through a spiritual encounter (in "Accolade" or "John the Baptist") and how others discover an alternate form of spirituality through physical intimacy (in "Faith" or "Ecclesia").

Frank and on unacknowledged modern novels such as *City Block* can still enhance our understanding of the complex historical entanglements which informed the experiments in American letters during the first decades of the new century. Frank's novel represents a yet unacknowledged experimental approach to dealing with the phenomenon of acceleration – one, in fact, that is particularly intriguing since it appeared in 1922 as a critical response to another, already established, approach in the American literary avant-garde. As Robert Scholes rightly points out, the "strong tendency in modernist discourse to exclude middles and emphasize extremes" entails the risk that we "never understand[] modern culture properly" (218). The case studies that follow will introduce two more unrecognized writers and novels 'of the middle.' In them, I will elucidate the unique ways in which Asch and Borden established themselves as writers of a different kind within the discourse of acceleration with their literary and non-literary texts. Furthermore, I will identify the correspondences to *City Block*'s aesthetic design, theme and agenda, which come into view in Asch's *The Office* and Borden's *Flamingo*. From these correspondences, I will deduce an alternate practice of modern American writing.

III.B. NATHAN ASCH AND *THE OFFICE* (1925): AN ETHICAL CRITIQUE AND A VISION OF A 'GOOD LIFE' IN MODERN AMERICA

In the August 1937 issue of *Scribener's*, one of the "elder" magazines that commonly published a "mix" of popular and avant-garde works (Scholes 222), a long and sympathetic review by John Chamberlain appeared, in which the author discusses Waldo Frank's cultural study *The American Jungle* and Nathan Asch's Depression road novel *The Road* (1937) side by side. According to Chamberlain, "each writer is, in his way, expressing what might be called the New Patriotism, an interest in and love for America that have nothing to do with armaments or the balance of trade or cash accretions" (60). In the 1928 article "The Whole Duty of the Young Novelist," printed in the April 1928 issue of *The Nation*, Clifton P. Fadiman similarly classifies both Frank and Asch as members of an unorganized group of young American men of letters "whose writing indicates an intelligent glimpsing of the aesthetic problem facing their generation" (446). The fact that Asch and Frank, as well as their aesthetic practices, were associated in the critical discourse of the day is noteworthy, yet the exact quality of their association requires a more careful scrutiny. Almost a century after Chamberlain and Fadiman, I will elucidate that not only Frank's and Asch's personal stances, but also their aesthetic approaches are comparable in many respects: both writers sympathized with leftist as well as 'modernist' stances, yet wholly devoted their life and work to neither. Both writers had a critical, yet generative outlook on the American project of acceleration, which led each of them, independently, to write a novel in the 1920s from which an alternate practice of modern writing can be deduced. In this chapter, I will corroborate Chamberlain's claim that also Asch's approach, too, is marked by a 'patriotic,' yet critical and generative optimism – and I will contest Fadiman's notion that "not a single one of the writers [...] is crusading for anything" (446). In Asch's novel, a generative agenda comes into view, as the second part of this chapter will elucidate: It appears specially designed (in form, style and content) to present a critical diagnosis that, ideally, sensitizes readers to acceleration's detrimental effects on individual and social life in the metropolis. Moreover, it negotiates the phenomenon of acceleration in action-oriented ways, presenting readers with an alternate vision of modern life and animating them to embrace change as well. A generative agenda can be discerned in both Frank's and Asch's novel. They represent two unique exemplars of an alternate practice of modern American prose writing that emerged as a reaction to the overarching discourse of acceleration in the 1920s.

The first part of this chapter will demonstrate that Asch's self-positioning in the literary field of the day was informed by both a growing critical outlook on the phenomenon of acceleration as well as by an action-oriented, visionary optimism that one might legitimately call 'patriotic.' As I scrutinize Asch's life and his non-literary works, I trace the comparatively cautious, yet effective acts of self-distancing, which the young Polish immigrant performed to establish himself as an experimental writer in modern America. In comparison to Frank, who voiced his critique and vision unrelentingly in *The Seven Arts* and beyond, Asch promoted himself less forcefully and less insistently – at times, for instance, he produced more easily digestible, entertaining texts, which would meet the taste of Hollywood audiences or of popular magazine readers, to overcome financial hardships. As I will show, however, Asch's subtle acts of self-distancing nevertheless marked him as a nonconformist in the literary field, where a domain-specific discourse of acceleration was just emerging.

The second part of this chapter will examine the ethical critique of acceleration as well as the vision of a 'good life,' which Asch presents in his 1925 debut novel *The Office* – only three years after *City Block*. Hartmut Rosa conceptualizes the "ethical critique" of acceleration as one that "is based on a conception of the good life (or negatively, of conditions which systematically undermine the realization of a good life, e.g., of states of alienation);" as one which identifies "structures or practices that cause people to fail realizing a good life" (*Alienation* 68).[219] As my reading will demonstrate, *The Office* identifies the temporal regime of the eponymous Wall Street office as one of these structures and it focuses its critique primarily on different forms of alienation,[220] which emerge in this context. Fourteen separate stories confront the reader with this critique time and again. In this way, Asch's novel transmits a critical diagnosis which the British political scientist Harold J. Laski presents in an article that appeared in the January 1930 issue of *Harper's Monthly* as well: "We have discovered, in fact, in the last twenty-five years that the supremacy of the profit-making motive is inconsistent with the achievement of an adequate life" (221). As in *City Block*, the generative agenda of *The Office* comes into relief in the way this critical diagnostic assessment of accelerated life is combined with a vision of a 'better life.' In Asch's novel, this vision is not mystical in nature, but it is based on similar values as the vision that *City Block* presents: social connectedness, a sense of self that arises from (emotional) *Erfahrung* and self-determination as well as health and, finally, deceleration.

III.B.1 A DIFFERENT STANCE: FROM ASSIMILATION TO SELF-DISTANCING

Many of Asch's non-literary writings reveal the author's frustration about his 'failure' to be acclaimed as a prominent American avant-gardist.[221] The first sentences in one of his unpublished literary notes, however, indicate that Asch was aware that this 'failure' had a different, positive dimension as well: "I sing the failures of the world, those that wanted-to-be but never-became. [...] I sing of the forever obscure, the failures in perpetuum" ("[I Sing]" 1). With these Whitmanesque lines, Asch identifies 'failing' in the modern American world as a virtuous act. In another of his unpublished texts, a reminiscence about his position as a claims clerk at C.B. Richards and Company in the early 1920s, Asch expresses more openly that 'failing,' at this time, meant that someone was more or less actively refusing to act according to the imperative of emotional detachment and speed. At the same time, he indicates why he considers 'failing' positive and necessary – a virtuous accomplishment in service of the democratic, social whole that Whitman's "Song of Myself" praises as well: He failed at the shipping company because, unlike his colleagues, he was not "so alert, so efficient" in client contact and because he refused to live up to the firm's precept that clerks should function as nothing but "impersonal writers-down, takers of money, givers-of-receipts." Asch remembers that he instinctively approached clients in a humane manner, sympathizing with the "love and the anxiety and the loneliness [they felt] and the[ir] desperation" ("Mr. Simmons" 4). Retroactively, Asch contends that this attitude was the reason why he was let go. Although his 'failure' as an American avant-garde writer was neither necessarily nor inevitably conditioned by his refusal to abide by the imperative of speed, Asch himself later attributed the fact that "[n]obody [in America] wanted to read" *The Office* to the counter-discursive portrayal of modern business which he incorporates with in it: "Wall Street offices didn't fail during the booming later nineteen-twenties; and if implied in my book was a prophesy of the looming depression nobody wanted to know about" it, he writes in a retrospective account ("Lysel" 11–12).

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[219] In his attempt to found a critical theory of social acceleration, Rosa differentiates between three "variants of a critique of temporal conditions:" The "*functionalist* critique of social institutions and practices," which is based on "the claim that a social system (or practice) *won't work* in the long run," the "*normative* critique of society," which "claims that a social formation or arrangement is not *good or justifiable* in the light of [certain] norms and values" as well as the "ethical critique" (*Alienation* 67–68). The latter is prominent in *The Office*.

[220] Rosa isolates six forms of alienation, namely the alienation from space, things, our actions, time, other people and the self. Definitions of these forms will be provided throughout the chapter when they become relevant for the analysis.

[221] Later in life, Asch lamented that writers like him were falling out of sight while writers such as Ernest Hemingway were celebrated (cf. Mills, "Ernest" 49).

In his retrospect "Mr. Simmons," however, Asch furthermore describes how very enthralled he was with the 'spectacle' of high-speed trading when he first encountered it on Wall Street. In this reminiscence about his job at the shipping company, he concedes that the "marvelously efficient" arbitrage trader in another division was as fascinating to him as "a one-man vaudeville show" because this man "listened to two telephone [sic!] at the same time while heas [sic!] replying to a third, while he was nodding to someone [...], while he was noting down on a pad on his desk the details of some deal he had just concluded" (2, 3, 2). In these lines, Asch identifies the operative speed, which the trader achieves through the accelerant technique of multitasking, as the quality that fascinated him as a young immigrant. In fact, Asch had been eager for assimilation and acceptance since he came to America in 1915. As one of Asch's personal notes reveals, this very eagerness was inextricably linked with the imperative of acceleration from the outset because his first social contacts in America prompted others to exert regulatory micro-power upon him: His first friend, a Jewish immigrant already "Americanised," Asch remembers, made him feel, with "slight condescension," that he was constantly "lagging behind," thereby prompting Asch to assess the source of his relative slowness ("why was I so slow?"). "To get along with the boys of my age," Asch remembers resolving, "I must adapt myself to them, imitate them, to the point of being indistinguishable" ("Phil" 1).[222] After graduating from Syracuse and Columbia University, Asch continued to strive for acceptance and success in a fashion that can only be called 'American' in the contemporary sense of the term (see chapter II.A.2): "[I]t was my dream to become an arbitrage trader" ("Mr. Simmons" 3).

Having left his position as a claims clerk, Asch was taken on as a telephone clerk at a Wall Street office where "[e]verything was set to the ticker that beat the fluctuations off into the room." As he was now required to "recognize and answer immediately each telephones' different ring" in order to process requests from other trading rooms as quickly as possible, Asch gained a first-hand experience of what it meant to synchronize one's pace of life with the technologically accelerated speed of Wall Street trading ("Mr. and Mrs. Prince" 1). In his literary note "Mr. and Mrs. Prince," Asch claims that the idea for *The Office* already "began spreading through" him at this time (2), yet in his "Statement of Record of Career as a Writer," he suggests that especially his subsequent employment as an exchange broker substantiated in him the conviction that (consciously or unconsciously) 'failing' in a world of speed was a virtue in itself. Asch identifies "the shock" of seeing his firm go bankrupt and of financially ruining his clients as the "profound experience" that prompted him to leave New York for Paris[223] and to write a critique of hyper-acceleration: *The Office* (1). As chapter II.C.2 demonstrates, such a conspicuous self-distancing was likely to mark an aspiring American writer, such as Ezra Pound, as a cultural adversary at the time. In his "Statement of Record," Asch retrospectively notes that he felt, at the time, that formulating such a critique would require him to distance himself from America both spatially, temporally and ideologically: In "New York and America," writing such a novel seemed impossible because people there "were too busy growing to have use for anyone who wanted to examine the growth. It had no room, no time for contemplation" (1). In Paris, which Asch evidently considered a comparatively decelerated time-space, he wrote his debut novel *The Office*. In it, he diverges from the American norm of (stylistically) celebrating the (experiential/technical) speed of the modern world. He apparently acted upon his empathetic concern for individual human beings when opting for a form, style and theme in *The Office* that seems designed to awaken readers to the "undeviating truth" about the lives people lead in the metropolis in the age of acceleration (Asch, "My Father and I" 58). Although Asch claimed that he could not – and did not want to – adapt to business life on Wall Street, he apparently still felt the need to distance himself spatially. This ultimately defiant act of "writing [such] a book about how it felt to be working in an office in New York" established him as a deviant American subject and avant-gardist: "I was an American myself, yet I wasn't," Asch writes in the note "Lysel" (2). As this statement reveals, Asch was aware that his spatial, ideological and stylistic self-distancing disqualified him as an American modernist, at least according to the criteria commonly used by (author-)critics as well as by oppositional writers such as Frank at the time. Just as Frank, Asch accepted this as a necessary evil. Having experienced the injurious reality of 'successfully' assimilated living on Wall Street, Asch apparently considered any 'failure' in the hyper-accelerated world as a success to be sung in a patriotic, Whitmanesque fashion. The reason was that through such a 'failure,' alternative modes of living (and writing) could materialize.

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[222] Due to this urge for assimilation, it shamed Asch that his parents spoke Yiddish in public ("My Father and I" 57).

[223] Asch knew Paris and its artistic scene from an earlier stay. Having been forced to leave their native country due to an involvement with revolutionary movements when Nathan was ten, the Asch family went to Paris. Here, Asch's father Scholem Asch, a prominent Jewish writer, introduced his son to the pre-war artistic avant-garde, particularly the Paris school around Marc Chagall, Moise Kisling and Jules Pascin. The concerns of immigrant life (cultural assimilation vs. alienation and "folk-consciousness") had brought his father's naturalistic novels great popularity (Berthoff 121). Due to the outbreak of the Great War two years later, the family left for America in 1915 (cf. Asch, "My Father and I" 56-57).

In Paris, Asch was "promptly identified as a writer bent on confronting without evasions the revolutionized circumstance of everyday life in the megapolitan twentieth century [...] through a corresponding modernization of style and narrative design," as Warner Berthoff claims (117). Impressed by the combination of critique and stylistic experiment in Asch's work, Ford Madox Ford became his main European supporter. Ford's first and foremost act of promotion was to publish the stories "The Voice of the Office," "Marc Kranz" and "Gertrude Donovan" in the *transatlantic review* next to contributions by already established American modernists such as Gertrude Stein and John Dos Passos as well as some texts by the equally unknown Hemingway.[224] Ford was similarly instrumental in the publishing of *The Office*, into which Asch later integrated these three stories. When they first appeared in *transatlantic review*, European modernists such as Eugene Jolas congratulated Ford for introducing the two "very interesting young writers" Asch and Hemingway (qtd. in Mills, "Ernest" 48). Yet "[f]rom the start," as Berthoff observes, Asch was perceived as "an odd fish in the post-1920 upsurge of new literary talent" (119). This was the case, I propose, due to the traditional stylistic and narratological patterns that Asch refused to discard in his prose. The hybrid style Asch opted for in order to bring his critique and his vision across inspired more speed-minded avant-gardists such as Hemingway (see footnote 148), to both "encourage[] as well as patronize[] and snub[]" him; to tell him that "there wasn't anything I [Asch] had that was original except maybe *a little freshness*" ("My Father and I" 58; Asch qtd. in Mills, "Ernest" 51, emphasis added).

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[224] See the December 1923, August 1924 and December 1924 issues.

Although Asch's non-literary writings reveal that he was disappointed about never having equaled Hemingway as a famous American writer of the modern age (cf. Asch, "[I Sing]"),[225] he stylized himself as a writer of a different sort in the same texts – as a writer whose innermost convictions created an almost insurmountable repugnance in him to write anything that conformed with a norm, be it an uncritical, stylistically fast 'modernist' piece or a "slick saleable story," which would appeal to popular taste: "One is reluctant [...], one hates oneself, one wants to get away," he writes in an unpublished retrospect ("[Literary Note, 1 Feb. 1952]" 1). Although it must be added here that Asch did not play out his 'otherness' as publicly as Frank – many of his non-literary texts remain unpublished – especially the tidily composed autobiographical texts collected in the Nathan Asch Papers at Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections in Rock Hill, SC appear to have been originally intended for publication. They seem designed to inform a learned audience about Asch's stance in the literary and cultural scene of the day. In "The Body of Hollywood," for instance, Asch suggests that his "I-don't-want-to-do-it feeling," combined with his growing reluctance to turn his glance away from the negative aspects of modern life, conditioned his feeling of "not belonging" in Hollywood, where he worked as a scriptwriter for RKO, Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer and Paramount between 1931 and 1933 ("[Literary Note, 1 Feb. 1952]" 1; "Body of Hollywood" 7). Self-confidently, Asch furthermore claims in this text that he was still "beating Hollywood," averting its influence, during this time because he kept on his work as a critical avant-gardist. He reproaches Hollywood directors as "ignorant and self-deluded" people who walked "streets [that were] glittering [...], and no one [of them was] worrying." Marking himself as different, Asch claims that 'successful' Hollywood writers-turned-directors were wholly "dependent on this facticious place" ("Body of Hollywood" 1, 2, 3, 2).

Although Asch elsewhere admitted that he was greatly relieved to be taken on as a scriptwriter with Paramount – it ended a period of severe financial hardship[226] – he critiqued the movie business for turning everything "into a gag, a situation" instead of addressing the problems of Depression America (Asch qtd. in Peeler 16). Just as Frank, who attacked 'utilitarian art' in similar ways (cf. ch. III.A.1), Asch distanced himself from allegedly unpolitical cine-art that was popular with American audiences. He even moved on to work with the leftist Film and Photo League, which "rebelled against Hollywood by producing stark documentary films of Depression conditions" (Peeler 16). Since Asch was primarily interested in the (emotional and psychological) lives of American individuals, rather than the capitalist macro-structures that conditioned the stock market crash, however, he set out on a four-month bus trip in order to "make [closer] contact with the 'reality' of Depression America" (Peeler 16). In 1937, he published an account of his trip with W.W. Norton and Co. *The Road: In Search of America* is both the last and the most recognized work that Asch was ever able to get published.[227]

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[225] In 1925, Paul Rosenfeld praised Hemingway's prose in *In Our Time* (1925) for being "characteristically iron with a lyricism, aliveness and energy tremendously held in check. [...] Empathic, short, declarative sentences follow staunchly one upon the other [...] The stubby verbal forms are speeded in instances up to the brute, rapid, joyous jab of blunt period upon period." Hemingway's style, Rosenfeld continues, "in its very experimental stage shows the outline of a new, tough, severe and satisfying beauty related equally to the world of machinery and the austerity of the red man" ("[Rev. of *In Our Time*]" 67, 68). Similarly, Allan Tate called the presentation in the novel a "facile accumulation of *petites sensations*" ("[Rev. of *In Our Time*]" 70; see also Fitzgerald; Gorman; Tate, "[Rev. of *The Torrents*]"). For a remarkable acclamation of Hemingway's "scientific method" of enriching sentences and phrases with "the maximum load of meaning, sense impressions, emotions" in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), see the review by poet and literary critic Donald Davidson (128, 132).

[226] In 1965, Asch recalled: "I was barely alive, a derelict, sleeping in the bus terminal [in Dallas], for the owner of the hotel I had been staying at bad finally locked me out for not paying the rent. Seeing my brother, I decided I was tired of starving and I went along to the Coast with him, determined to get a job writing scenarios for pictures. Some four months later – on sheer nerve – I had a contract with Paramount" ("My Father and I" 59). See the *Hollywood Filmograph* (26 Mar. 1932, 3) for a short notice that Asch was signed by Paramount alongside Joseph Moncure March, the author of the poem "The Wild Party" (1928), which addresses social life in the metropolis in similar ways as Asch does in his short stories. Asch's career as a writer in Hollywood was chronicled in *Hollywood Filmograph* (17 Mar. 1934, 7), *The Film Daily* (10 Oct. 1932, 2) and *Variety* (see 5 July 1932, 40; 13 Sept. 1932, 7; 29 Nov. 1932, 7; 23 Aug., 1933, 8).

ASCH'S REVIEWS: AN ALTERNATE VISION OF MODERN AMERICAN LETTERS

During the 1920s and 30s, the short works published by Asch in American magazines became the site where he most forcefully marked himself as an aspiring writer of a different sort. In his reviews, for instance, Asch endorsed an ideal of modern American letters that differed markedly from the one that some of his American contemporaries were promoting at the time. Although he was much less confrontational than Frank in opposing American modernists who seemed to gloss over the negative side-effects of acceleration for self-validational purposes, Asch's reviews signaled to other authors and critics in the field that his ideal of modern American letters was of a different kind: Unlike Dos Passos or Marianne Moore, Asch did not jump at the chance to celebrate the thrilling speed-aesthetic in E.E. Cummings' *Eimi*. In his review of the work, which appeared on April 26, 1933 in *The New Republic*, he instead emphasizes the 'other' qualities that exist in *Eimi* – qualities that critics of the day commonly deemphasized for the sake of conceptual consolidation and canonization (see chapter II.C.2). In a conspicuously parenthetical manner, Asch mentions that *Eimi* "is written in Mr. Cummings' familiar and poetic style." More openly, he critiques how "[o]ccasionally the pattern [in *Eimi*] weaves in loveliness, [...] but then again [...] the page becomes a puzzle." What Asch misses in Cummings' modern narrative, he notes, is that the text at any point "recollect[s] in tranquility" its own subject matter and meaning.[228] As a result, Asch notes, Cummings "expression of it [the subject matter] does not always provoke rapture in us" ("Descent" 314). Instead of praising the "transcendent experience" produced in the reader by Cummings' speed-narrative, Asch critiques that the text offers "no clue, no key" to the reader – it takes no time 'in tranquility' for reflection or explication ("Descent" 314). In this review, it transpires that Asch attacked the acclaimed narrative *Eimi* for excluding moments of stylistic-narratological slowness ('tranquility'), in which effective, if implicit, reader guidance is implemented ('clue' and 'key') and affects the reader deeply, possibly delivering her from her fast lifeworld (creates a 'rapture').

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[227] *The Road* received comparatively much attention (at the time and retrospectively) as an early precursor of first-hand accounts about Depression America by travelling American writers. See, for instance, Bessie and Chamberlain, "Tease Travelogue" for contemporary responses; see Bold, Gross, Klein, Lennon and Peeler for more recent readings. To earn a livelihood, Asch later worked as a writer for the Works Progress Administration (1937-39) but he continued to publish short stories, many of which appeared in magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Redbook* – and many of which might indeed be described as rather 'slick and saleable,' to use Asch's expression. See especially "5 to 7;" "Barbara;" "The Secret." Every novel Asch wrote after 1937 was rejected by publishers. Robert N. Linscott of Random House, for instance, found the "impressionistic reporting of the liberation of Paris" in *Paris is Home* "curiously dated" (1); *The Shrewd and the Mad* was rejected despite the "first-rate writing in it" because the editors at Charles Scribener's Sons saw the novel as "a minor tour de force which leaves the reader without a strong impression" ("[Letter to Toni Strassman]" 1).

[228] By including this intertextual reference to William Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Asch implicitly links his standards to a century-old romantic conception of literariness.

In line with the alternate ideal of modern American prose which Asch sketches in this review, he elsewhere explicitly critiqued that critics of the day decentralized the socio-critical content of experimental writers' work and thus reduced it to "a model for [...] style only." In a review of the works by the "advanced [Russian] thinker" Anton Chekov, he points to the fact that Chekov's literary work actually employs an "unflinching" social realism to "show[] people in every mood, under every circumstance, in every condition." Chekhov's stories, Asch notes, are "not pleasant stories" since the aim was, rightly, "not to entertain; he thought it sufficient to portray life" ("A Russian Pessimist" 601). With these comments, Asch let readers of *The New Republic* know that he shared an alternate ideal of modern (American) writing with authors such as Chekhov: "[T]he purpose" of modern writing, he proclaims more openly in a review of Edward Newhouse's proletarian novels, is to produce a rupture in the reader and, by extension, in the world: it should "change it" ("[Rev. of *This Is Your Day*]" 218). In his appraisal of Edward Dahlberg's socio-critical prose, Asch reiterates this position. Dahlberg's fiction "hurts to read" and it rightly does so, Asch proclaims in his review of *From Flushing to Calvary*, and he appeals to *New Republic* readers: "The only hope is that you will read these books; because then you will not close your eyes" ("Tale" 233). It was this hope and this ambition – to criticize, to create awareness and to provoke change – that informed Asch's practice in novels such as *The Office* as well, as the second part of this case study will elucidate.

ASCH'S PUBLISHED STORIES: A CRITIQUE OF INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL LIFE IN THE METROPOLIS

Unlike Frank, Asch was rather diffident in establishing himself as a writer with a distinct political and ideological stance – a fact that quite possibly conditions the common omission of his name in comprehensive histories of the literary scene in modern America. Throughout the second half of the 1920s and in the 1930s, Asch merely solidified his stance within the literary field by sympathizing with leftist assessments of capitalism in his short prose. After his return to the United States in 1925, he published short stories that render his critique of life in the American metropolis explicit. These stories never appeared in the avant-garde little magazines where canonical author-critics such as Moore and Williams commonly placed their texts. Instead, they were accepted by leftist magazines such as *The New Masses*, the "major radical vehicle [of the Communist Party that] [...] constituted an important venue for a small coterie of writers like Michael Gold, Max Eastman and Genevieve Taggard," where contributors usually "aimed at a revolution in content, not in form" since 1926 (Dumenil 23; Fishbein qtd. in Kingham 406).[229] Asch's story "The Bus-Boy," published in *New Masses*' May 1926 issue, for instance, critiques the working conditions in the metropolis. The practically plot-less story takes a young boy who works in a diner as its focalizer, presenting a subjective account of the detrimental *Takt* of metropolitan work: "Again outside. Again air that was fresher. Again dishes. Again wiping. Again into the kitchen. Again out. Again dishes" (13). In these short, declarative phrases, techniques of textual acceleration are used to transmit a temporality of incessant movement and action, which functionally interrelated work-processes in the metropolis demanded. On the level of content, the narrative reveals that the focalizer needs to keep up with the anonymous crowd of "[o]ffice boys, and shipping clerks, and other clerks," who "ran in, hurriedly ordered, hurriedly ate, paid, and ran out again" (27). These enumerative, sequenced constructions create a breathless rhythm, yet they do not evoke a positive feeling of thrill: The situation that "Bus-Boy" describes in terse sentences draws the reader's attention to the stress and physical exhaustion which the nameless focalizer has to endure in the face of an endless accumulation of similar tasks: The boy's "hands were tired, and the stomach hurt, and the throat was dry, and the eyes wouldn't keep open" (13).

"Bus-Boy" confronts modern readers with a similar diagnosis of the individual's status in an age of functional differentiation and temporal integration as Georg Simmel does in his discussion of the "disguised slaves" of the money economy in *The Philosophy of Money* (300):

> even though we are much more dependent on the whole of society through the complexity of our needs on the one hand, and the specialization of our abilities on the other, [...] we are remarkably independent of every *specific* member of this society, because his significance for us has been transferred to the one-sided objectivity of his contribution, which can be just as easily produced by any number of other people. (298)

"Bus-Boy" raises awareness to this fact already in 1926 and it relates it, more directly than Simmel, to the temporal regime of modernity. Having created empathy with the boy who goes beyond his physical and mental capacities to stay in sync with the metropolitan *Takt*, Asch's story draws attention to the fact that the nameless bus-boy has no other choice than to succumb to the temporal regime of the diner. If he didn't – "if he were caught sleeping," pausing – he would be replaced immediately by another nameless boy who would 'function' better, which would leave the protagonist with a fatal loss of a livelihood: "[T]here would be no second meal for him, and no dollar in the morning" (Asch, "Bus-Boy" 13).

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[229] Throughout and after the 1930s, Asch wrote reviews and short articles for *The New Yorker, The New Republic, Commentary* and *Forum*. Articles Asch saved in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, today collected in box 7, folder 41 in Nathan Asch Papers, reveal Asch's interest in leftist literature. They include Philip Rhav's article "Two Years of Progress: From Waldo Frank to Donald Odgen Steward," which appeared in *Partisan Review* in February 1938 (22-30), George Orwell's "Literature and the Left," which was published in *Tribune* on June 4, 1943 (19) and a copy of the ultra-leftist magazine *Goad* from January 1953. Due to an "investigation by the House of Un-American Activities Committee that probed her husband's supposed left-wing activities during the 1930s and her father-in-law's connections with Soviet Russia," Asch's third wife Carol "was temporarily suspended from her job with the Civil Service Commission" ("Nathan Asch (1902-1964)"). In this context, Asch himself submitted an "Explanatory Statement" to the United States Civil Service Commission, in which he admits to his sympathies and contacts with left-wing stances and periodicals until 1938 but denied any direct political involvement with the Communist Party (cf. Asch, "Deene" 18–19; Asch, "My Father" 53; Mills, "Nathan Asch and Ernest Hemingway" 7–8).

"Taxi Dance: A Short Story" appeared in *New Masses*' March 31, 1936 issue as another case study of urban life through which Asch established his leftist stance in the literary scene. Specifically, this story critiques that a modern entertainment format such as the taxi dance hall has lastingly impacted not only individual life in urban America but has also established alienating social practices. As the nameless I-as-protagonist narrator enters the taxi dance hall,[230] he buys ten tickets which can be redeemed for dances with the girls who are lined up beside the entrance. In Asch's portrayal, these taxi-dancers resemble mass-produced commodities touting their stimulating external features: "the girls smiled at me, rolled their eyes at me, lasciviously wriggled their hips at me" (18). In the commercial site of the dance hall, the story illustrates, inactivity and deep-reaching interaction are a taboo since these activities would slow down the rhythm of profit-making: The reader witness the protagonist's bewilderment at the fact that these taboos forbid him to pay a girl to "sit down and talk [...] like a human being." In a matter-of-fact tone, the taxi-dancer explains that the protagonist has "to spend it in drinking or dancing" (18). Going even further than contemporary Chicago School sociologists, who merely note in their studies that taxi-dancers commonly have "a definite and rather permanent economic relationship to the establishment," Asch's story suggests that social interaction in the institution of the taxi dance hall has been synchronized with the *Takt* of American business (about 90 seconds per dance) and has thereby established the climate of alienation as a normality (Cressey 38, cf. 11).

The story's closing scene substantiates this critical diagnosis. It illustrates how the all-pervading *Takt* of the machine age has normalized socially alienating lifestyles. Since he still hopes to find intimacy and compassion, the protagonist accompanies two taxi-dancers and their one-night stands to an apartment, where he encounters another female lodger:

> "Why aren't you a taxi dancer?"
> "I'm not old enough. I'll be a taxi dancer next year."
> I said: "Come here."
> She came closer. I was very maudlin. I took her hands, and I kissed them, and I said:
> "Forgive me, my sister."

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[230] In a contemporary study on this urban establishment, the Chicago School sociologist Paul Goalby Cressey observes that since 1925, "taxi-dance halls have increased in number an in importance until they are now [in 1932] the dominant type of dance hall in the business centers of our largest cities." In these dance halls, young girls acting as 'taxi-dancers' are paid a fifty-fifty commission to dance with patrons (3, xix).

She looked at me scared and she ran out of the room. (18)

No explanation is offered for the girl's reaction in Asch's short story, yet the portrayal reveals that even a girl who is 'only' yet engaged in the time-regime of modern industry (she works at a radio assembling plant) is bewildered at the protagonist's display of compassion, which arises in him when he realizes that she is bound to subject her body and mind to the fragmenting *Takt* of urban amusement as well. With such counter-discursive portrayals as "Bus-Boy" and "Taxi Dance," Nathan Asch established himself as a writer of a different sort within the literary scene – a writer who combines leftist criticism with literary experimentation.

The quoted reviews as well as the stories "Bus-Boy" and "Taxi Dance" illustrate that Asch established his stance as a modern American avant-gardist of an alternate kind by sympathizing with distinct movements of the day, such as left-wing criticism and, stylistically, what was commonly promoted as 'American modernism' at the time. Just as Frank, however, Asch ultimately distanced himself from these movements to pursue his own, generative aims: to critically re-examine modern American life on the micro-level and to devise an alternate aesthetic that combines 'new' and 'fast' styles/narrative modes with 'old' and 'slow' styles for the purpose of sensitizing readers to the detrimental effects of acceleration and of animating them to change their own accustomed ways.

PROMOTING AND REVIEWING AN ALTERNATE NOVEL

Advertisements for *The Office* reveal that the publisher Harcourt, Brace & Company expected that the unconventional agenda that marks Asch's experimental novel would deter American readers. Advertisements for *The Office* that appeared in *The American Mercury*, a magazine that "bridged the gap between the small-circulated specialized market [i.e., the little magazines] and the mass-circulated national market" (Gold), emphasize the novel's compliance with the norms of the overarching discourse of acceleration in style and content. At the same time, they vaguely hint at the fact that *The Office* diverges from these norms in other respects. In the November 1925 issue, for instance, the advertisement features an illustration of high-rise office buildings, which had become the emblem of American progress and speed (cf. chapter II.B.2). At first glance, the advertisement thus aligns Asch's novel with speed-pioneering in American business (architecture). The blurb's first line, markedly spread out for emphasis, similarly nurtures the idea that *The Office* presents a thrilling, perhaps even experimental panorama of American office life. The remainder of the blurb, however, suggests that the novel primarily focuses on the 'inner life' of the office personnel. Thus, it hints at the fact that Asch's novel uses more traditional modes of presentation as well.[231] The advertisements that appeared in the subsequent issues of *The American Mercury* more openly identify *The Office* as an "*unusual* novel in which the author pries into the *secret thoughts* of the workers in a typical Wall Street brokerage firm" (Dec. 1925, emphases added) or indicate its ideological and/or stylistic in-betweenness by labeling it "a *brilliant and unusual* story of New York life" (Jan. 1926). To entice buyers at the bookstore, however Harcourt, Brace and Co. chose a simple, yet evocative drawing of high-rise office buildings as a cover illustration while Asch's British publisher Holden literally put the bankruptcy at the cover's center (see figure 1).[232]

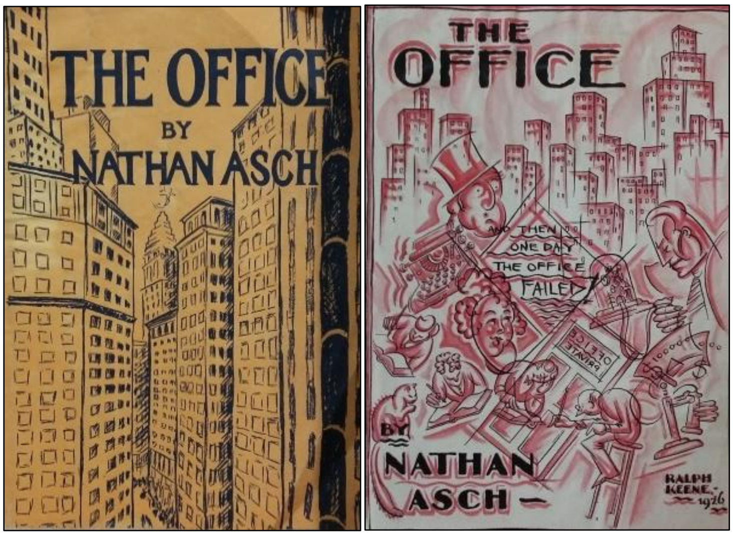

FIGURE 1: Dissimilar cover illustrations for *The Office* in America (left) and in Britain (right).

The in-betweenness of *The Office*, to which these sources hint, inspired critics from different 'camps' to highlight distinct dimensions of the novel in their reviews. Moses Harper, writing in the December 16, 1925 issue of *The New Republic* for instance overemphasizes the novel's experimental character and, accordingly, neglects its 'other' dimensions (the critique of metropolitan life, the conventional style used in fourteen stories). He calls Asch's novel "one of those experiments, turned by a clever, hasty hand, which is chiefly remarkable as an experiment" (119). Responses that were published in ultra-leftist periodicals such as *New Masses* meanwhile overemphasized the dominance, which a capitalist institution, the eponymous office, actually has in the novel. Thus, it seems, they tried to claim it for their own political/cultural project: "ALTHOUGH it is now not as generally recognized as it should be," the reviewer James T. Farrell writes,

> the work of Nathan Asch has been one of the first anticipations of the type of writing that is now being done by various of our so-called younger and Left writers. He happens to have been one of the first American novelists to have set out with the aim of attaining in his novels [...] a suggestion of the way an institution like an office organizes the life of a group of white-collar bread winners and tends, almost, to drain into itself their hopes, their aspirations of life. (28)

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[231] See the publisher's synopsis on the book jacket of the first edition as well. Vaguely but specifically, the synopsis hints at the 'hybrid' composition of *The Office* by addressing the quasi-scientific approach of Asch as well as the novel's focus on human emotion and psychology: "The author's method is that of a scientist who explodes a complex unity and then analyzes one by one the dysrupted [sic!] atoms. He shows us the human side of that correlation of individuals working for a common end which we call 'the office'."

[232] These two book jackets are preserved in Box 6, Folder 40 of the Nathan Asch Papers at Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections, Rock Hill, SC.

Leftist reviewers such as Farrell thus claimed Asch's work for their own cause and leftist artists such as Dos Passos approached Asch, inviting him to discuss *The Office* at the New Playwrights' Theater in New York.[233] Generally speaking, however, the novel did not sell well in the United States and was hardly recognized by critics – a fact that Asch himself later attributed to the counter-discursive content, which appealed to leftist readers (cf. "Lysel" 11–12).[234]

On the other side of the Atlantic, however, Ford Madox Ford validated *The Office* as a 'modernist' novel because for him, the critique of fast capitalism included within it was compatible with such a label. In his introductory note to Asch's second novel *Love in Chartres* (1927), he calls *The Office* "a fire engine crashing down broadway," which "would appear on the surface to be a grammophone rendering of the rattling and clangings" (v). The conspicuous reference to Williams' famous imagist poem "The Great Figure" was certainly intended by Ford to boost his protégé's status among the American avant-garde – it accentuates the technical novelty that distinguishes *The Office* from Asch's stylistically unremarkable second novel, which resembles, in comparison, "a quiet and insistent idyll," as Ford notes. Taking note of *The Office*'s counter-discursive elements, however, Ford addressed also the "rather harsh" manner in which it depicts "the violence and clamour" of metropolitan life ("[Introductory Note]" v, v, vii).[235]

When *The Office* was first published, two exceptional reviews clearly delineated its position in-between the writings of the political left and what was just critically established as American literary modernism: They identified its similarities with both leftist and 'modernist' approaches, yet also indicated the ways in which it diverged from both. The Marxist critic Granville Hicks, for instance, writes that *The Office* resembles leftist analyses of capitalist super-structures since it includes "an awareness of the forces that control offices and companies." As he continues, however, Hicks underlines as well that *The Office* "depend[s] too much on the unity of place and mood" to count as "fully Marxian" assessment (217). In other words, Hicks proclaims that the novel focuses predominantly on aspects that are conditioned by capitalist super-structures (sentiments, psychologies, etc.) rather than on these structures as such. Taking acclaimed

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[233] On behalf of this leftist group, which also included the Jewish author Michael Gold (the author of *Jews Without Money*, 1930), Dos Passos wrote to Asch: "We are very anxious to talk to you about The Office. Won't you [...] make an appointment about it?" ("[Letter to Nathan Asch]" 1). Whether this meeting ever took place is uncertain, yet Asch reworked some chapters of his novel into a play, a copy of which is preserved in box 19, folder 107 of the "Nathan Asch Papers" at Louise Pettus Archive and Special Collections, Rock Hill, S.C. The play was produced by the Frankfurt am Main State Theater in December 1930, as indicated with pencil on the title page. Asch's story "The City," which addresses the social alienation and frustrations of city life, was included in the collection *The Second American Caravan* in 1928 – a volume that also featured stories by Kay Boyle, Paul Strand, Jean Toomer and Waldo Frank, among others, and was compiled by Frank's *Seven Arts* associates Alfred Kreymborg and Van Wyck Brooks (Mills, "Ernest" 48). Although Asch's work never appeared in *The Seven Arts*, there seems to have existed an affirmative relation between Asch's practice and the marginal branch of leftist cultural criticism, within which Frank developed his alternate practice.

[234] Asch's novels were very popular with German audiences as well as in Communist Russia (cf. Berthoff 118). His popularity in Germany was abruptly undercut in 1933 by the Nazi Regimes' book burnings. As Asch himself put it, his "name had been wiped out" ("My Father and I" 59).

[235] In a 1931 article, Ford counted Asch among a number of new and promising American writers who, during the 1920s, had "observed life with an astonishing justness" ("A Stage" 371).

'modernist' practices as a point of reference, a reviewer in the October 1926 issue of the British *Bookman* similarly praises how skillfully *The Office* presents the "activities of an office in Wall Street [...] in a few words, as forceful and forging as hammer blows." At the same time, the reviewer identifies two ways in which *The Office* diverges from what came to designate American literary modernism at the time: The novel draws the reader's attention to the fact that "the everlasting chase after the almighty dollar is the only thing that matters" for 'successfully' synchronized Americans. Furthermore, it rehabilitates old and slow forms of storytelling to "lay[] bare the inner lives of those who have been affected by the failure [...], and again and again the reader is surprised into recognizing something which is identical with his own introspective experience" ("Office" 98). As these insightful responses indicate, *The Office* was recognized – stylistically and ideologically – as similarly ambivalent as the aspiring avant-garde writer Asch: As a novel that overlaps, yet never wholly corresponds to, different political/ideological positions of the day; as a novel that appropriates multiple positions to address the negative impact of the speed-imperative as well as to develop strategies of managing high-speed modernity on the individual and social level. The second part of this chapter will systematically examine *The Office* in order to illustrate the ways in which the novel is arranged to produce such a generative effect.

III.B.2 THE PROSPECT OF 'FAILURE:' NATHAN ASCH'S *THE OFFICE*

The following examination of *The Office* will reveal that the novel's conception is unique, yet resembles that of *City Block*. A generative agenda informs this novel: Just as *City Block,* it focuses on the emotional and psychological life of modern individuals for the purpose of diagnosing and criticizing[236] as well as promoting alternative ways of managing modern life. Asch's novel is specially designed to disillusion readers and to activate them. To use Frank's term, it is designed to 'transfigure.'

The following close readings examine the interplay of form, style and content in *The Office*, tracing the ways in which a generative agenda is implemented within it. All the while, I will draw attention to analogies that exist between *The Office* and *City Block* to substantiate my claim that both Asch and Frank opted for a similar technique at roughly the same time and for a similar purpose. I will reveal how the individual 'chapters' of *The Office* interact with one another to draw readers' attention to the underlying (institutional/temporal) structures and habitual practices that inhibit modern individuals from living a 'good life.' This assessment will furthermore reveal that Asch's novel repeatedly draws attention to specific forms of alienation, which Rosa distinguishes in his conception of the ethical critique, too. The following close readings will proceed in a roughly chronological manner in order to show how three generative dimensions gradually unfold within the novel. Related ‘chapters’ will be grouped in order to demonstrate exemplarily how they work together to implement the novel’s critical, yet generative agenda.

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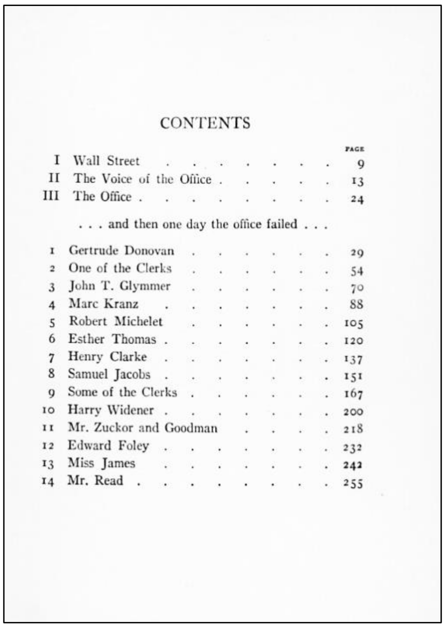
[236] In this respect, *City Block* and *The Office* resemble Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Jean Toomer's *Cane.*

Performing Inexorable Speed?: Experiments in Textual Acceleration in the First Section of *The Office*



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	. . . and then one day the office failed . . .	
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Figure 2: Table of contents in *The Office*.

The setup of the contents page in *The Office* (see figure 2) already suggests to the reader that the book in front of her might not be a conventional prose narrative, in which a sequence of chapters gradually unravels a story. It reveals that Asch’s novel is an unusual composition of sorts: *The Office* is divided into two larger sections, the first of which contains three ‘chapters,’ the second containing fourteen. The ‘chapter’ titles moreover indicate that the two sections differ in focus: While the first addresses larger structures which also Marxist critiques addressed at the time – places such as Wall Street and an office as well as the latter’s ‘voice’ – the second focuses on fourteen individuals or small groups of people. The contents page further emphasizes that there exists a clear division between these two sections: Not only does the ‘chapter’ count start anew with the second section (Arabic numerals substitute Roman numerals). Also, the sections are kept apart by the line ‘… and then one day the office failed …’ – a notice about an apparently incisive plot element that stretches almost across the whole width of the printed table with three full stops on either end.

In fact, the ‘chapters’ that make up the two sections of Asch’s novel, respectively, could not be more different in nature. While those in the second section can legitimately be called ‘stories’ since they give a coherent account of a self-contained incident (the failure and its aftermath) and since they focus on a single character or small group, the ‘chapters’ in the first section of *The Office* represent three experimental texts that show, rather than narratively ‘tell,’ the setting of Asch’s novel in a conspicuously experimental manner: New York and its financial business center, where modern communication technologies such as the stock ticker and the telephone had accelerated the pace at which values and interests, abstracted into monetary digits, could be “rushed through the greatest number of hands” since 1817 (Simmel, *Philosophy* 512; cf. Steen 67).[237] The juxtaposition of ‘fast’ and ‘slow’ styles in *The Office* is, hence, much more radical and conspicuous than in *City Block*, where techniques of textual acceleration are appropriated to express the psychological effects of speed. Nevertheless, the fact that both Asch and Frank evidently considered some sort of hybrid aesthetic as more suited for the purpose of sensitizing readers to the downsides of acceleration marks their novels as two different realizations of an alternate practice of American experimental prose writing. This stylistic hybridity materializes within Asch's novel at the transition from the first, experimental section, to the second, markedly decelerated section. In the fourteen stories that are contained in the latter, critical diagnoses are presented and reiterated to gradually but persistently disillusion the reader about celebratory tales of American speed-pioneering, which he encounters in the novel's first section.

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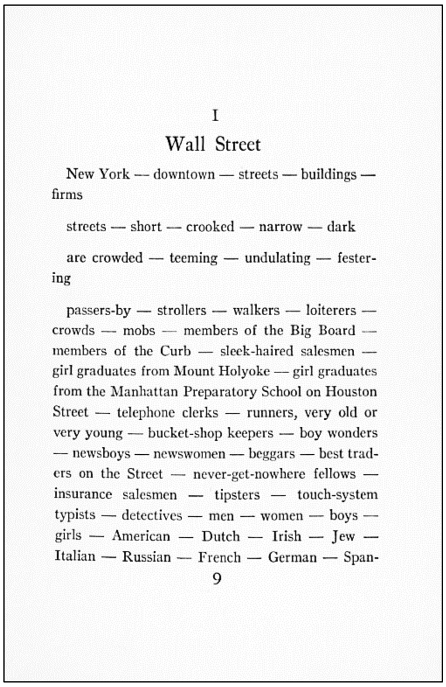
[237] The first stock tickers were introduced to the New York Stock Exchange already in 1867. In July 1922, *Wall Street Journal* reported that with a number of 4.632, 64% of tickers were located in New York City. They were used to “send official quotations reported directly from the floor” to offices, thus eliminating the space and time in-between. This form of

The 'chapters' in *The Office*'s first section, thus, build the foundation for this effect of disillusionment. They confront the reader with three experimental texts that present themselves as perfect, yet dissimilar actualizations of the speed-imperative in prose. In this manner, they present her with stylistic evocations of the new sensory-temporal quality of metropolitan America, which potentially heighten the intensity of the reading experience (i.e., her pace of life). Additionally, they join in with other celebratory tales of American speed-pioneering and confront her with a novel experiment in textual acceleration in each 'chapter.' Thus, they effectively heighten the rate at which the reader encounters change on the level of form. When proceeding from the contents page to what appears to be the first 'chapter' of the novel, the reader expecting a conventional narrative will be confounded by the completely shattered syntax, which confronts him on the first page of "Wall Street" (see figure 3). The page contains a mere paratactic sequence of single words (or short phrases), in which each element is separated from the preceding and the following one by dashes. Although the indented first line after each line break and the long passage on the lower half of the page suggest that the text is still arranged on the page according to the paragraph pattern of printed prose, its eye-catching experimental quality draws the reader's attention to the text's lyrical quality – its apparent conception as a modernist prose poem.[238] As it shatters genre expectations already on the first page, Asch's novel sensitizes



I

Wall Street

New York — downtown — streets — buildings — firms

streets — short — crooked — narrow — dark

are crowded — teeming — undulating — festering

passers-by — strollers — walkers — loiterers — crowds — mobs — members of the Big Board — members of the Curb — sleek-haired salesmen — girl graduates from Mount Holyoke — girl graduates from the Manhattan Preparatory School on Houston Street — telephone clerks — runners, very old or very young — bucket-shop keepers — boy wonders — newsboys — newswomen — beggars — best traders on the Street — never-get-nowhere fellows — insurance salesmen — tipsters — touch-system typists — detectives — men — women — boys — girls — American — Dutch — Irish — Jew — Italian — Russian — French — German — Span-

9

FIGURE 3: The opening of "Wall Street."

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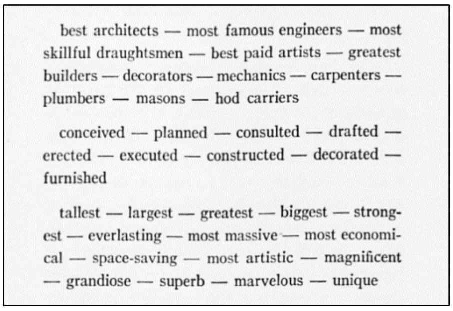
technical acceleration was continuously improved. New apparatuses were expected to accelerate the tickers of New York Quotation Co. by 15 to 25 per cent in 1922 alone ("Where Stock Tickers" 3; "Stock Exchange News" 16).

[238] Edward Hirsch defines the prose poem as a "composition that is printed as prose" and "avails itself of the elements of prose [...] while foregrounding the devices of poetry" (489).

the reader to the possibility that the printed list (of places and institutions, adjectives and progressive verbs that describe the streets, groups of city dwellers) is in fact an avant-gardist evocation of New York's center of trade and business – particularly of its new temporal quality. If one approaches the text as a lyrical composition, as a reader might do who originally expected a conventional prose narrative, it becomes clear that the combination of theme (Wall Street), content and style in this composition constitutes a literary chronotope in which "spatial and temporal indicators [are fused] into one carefully thought-out, concrete [aesthetic] whole" (Bakhtin 84). This very chronotope offers Asch's reader a vicarious experience of the (temporal) reality of Wall Street: the terse, unmediated sequence of reduced, unconnected elements or attributes increases the rate of stimulation for her while she reads. Thus, the first page of *The Office* quite possibly foists the impression on the reader that the novel aligns itself with other avant-garde experiments of the day, which were celebrated as novel, fast and American. Just as these, Asch's novel appears perfectly adapted to the norms and imperatives that had been established within the overarching discourse of acceleration. As chapter II.A illustrates, such a style was commonly used in contemporary film advertisements, too, to signal to potential patrons at a single glance that the advertised film will provide her with many thrills or laughs per minute, hence accelerate her pace of life.

The content of the prose poem "Wall Street" reinforces this impression. It amasses icons of American speed-pioneering – a metropolis, straight streets, high-rise buildings and efficient offices (see figure 3). This manner of reproducing celebratory tales of American speed-pioneering is taken to the extreme in three succeeding 'paragraphs,' which the reader encounters on the second page (see figure 4). Focusing on American speed-pioneering in the domain of modern business architecture, the first and second paragraphs enumerate the heroes and the efficient processes of skyscraper construction, which newspapers celebrated at the time. The style meanwhile evokes the unprecedented speed at which buildings could now be constructed (cf. chapter II.B.2).



best architects — most famous engineers — most skillful draughtsmen — best paid artists — greatest builders — decorators — mechanics — carpenters — plumbers — masons — hod carriers

conceived — planned — consulted — drafted — erected — executed — constructed — decorated — furnished

tallest — largest — greatest — biggest — strongest — everlasting — most massive — most economical — space-saving — most artistic — magnificent — grandiose — superb — marvelous — unique

FIGURE 4: Clipping from the second page of "Wall Street."

The third 'paragraph' evokes a sublime encounter of a beholder with the finished high-rise building. The list of the skyscraper's (physical) features in the superlative form ('tallest – largest – greatest – biggest – strongest – everlasting – most massive'), which opens the 'paragraph,' expresses the overwhelming awe initially felt by a beholder when he is suddenly confronted with a formerly unknown magnitude or vastness (cf. Berressem 168; Nye 7). The remainder of the list illustrates the process of rationalization, the succeeding phase of sublime encounters, through which a beholder finally "recuperates a sense of superior self-worth, because the mind is able to conceive something larger and more powerful than the senses can grasp" (Nye 7). The listed qualities ('most economical – space saving') indicate that American expertise in efficiency-engineering has created this awe-inspiring icon of modern business. A sense of superiority and national pride is expressed by the final attributes in the list ('most artistic – magnificent – grandiose – superb – marvelous – unique'). As this close reading reveals, "Wall Street" is specially constructed to foist the impression on the reader that Asch's novel 'successfully' participates in the acceleration of American avant-garde letters.

A similar impression is conveyed by the second experimental text in *The Office*, "The Voice of the Office." It confronts the reader with another, stylistically novel evocation of life's speed in the metropolis, now focusing specifically on the eponymous Wall Street office Glymmer, Read & Co. The narrative follows Mr. Zuckor, the office manager, through the three phases of the working day: his arrival at the office before the market opens, the phase of active trading as well as the end of his workday.

As in "Wall Street," techniques of textual economization and sequencing, common in 'fast' avant-garde texts of the day, are applied: Potentially obstructing or decelerating punctuation is eliminated and diverse actions/stimuli, separated by line breaks, are arranged in a terse sequence[239] that flows down the page as in a poem by Cummings or Williams.[240] The sequence of short 'paragraphs' that constitutes the experimental text thus records the high rate at which external stimuli (greetings, telephone bells, office talk he overhears) attract Zuckor's attention as well as the frequency at which he himself performs certain verbal and non-verbal acts. The experimental text evokes Zuckor's remarkable pace of life. The two strands of conversation overheard by Zuckor – a monologue by a clerk about a game as well as an exchange between two clerks called Michelet and Read about the former's romance with "a Jane" (13) – are spread out across three pages (see figure 5 on the next page), illustrating the great density of auditory stimulation and individual action which Zuckor experiences during a short time span. The reader is invited to take note of the great amount of stimuli and activities that are recorded on page fourteen in-between Michelet's utterances 'what do you think' and 'couldn't do a thing with her.' As this arrangement suggests, almost no story time elapses between these two utterances, yet a remarkable amount of things happens at the office.

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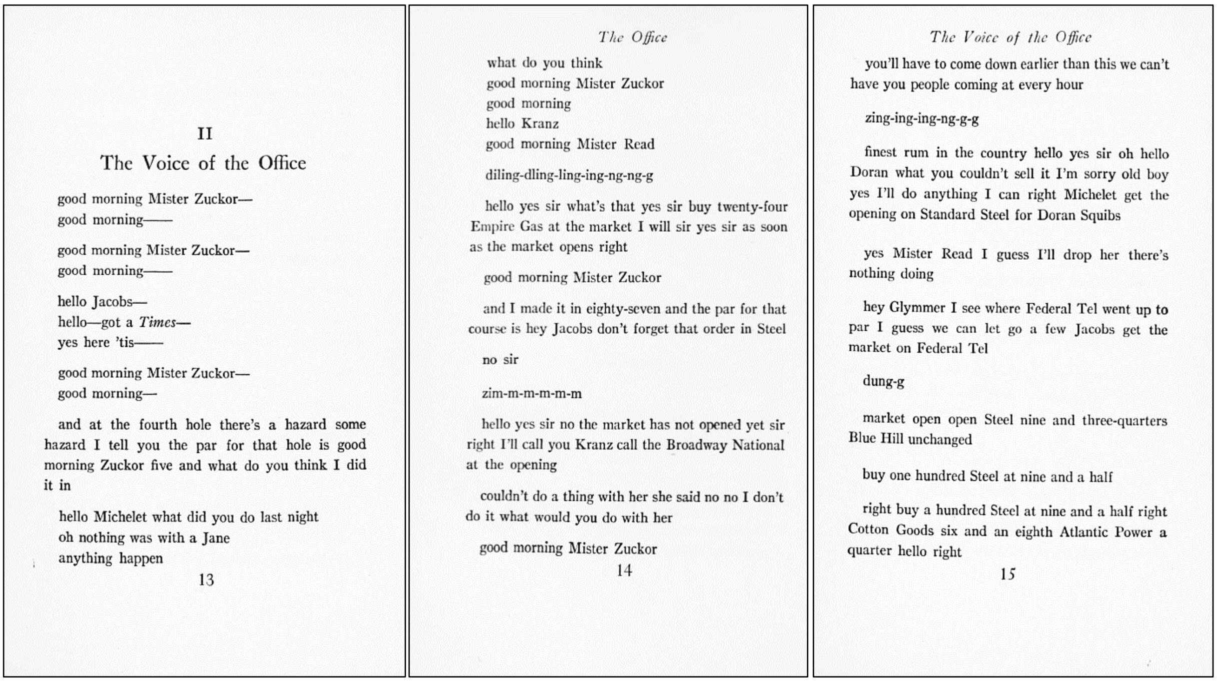
[239] The length of the 'paragraphs' in this text ranges from one to four lines.

[240] See for instance Williams' poems "The Wind Increases" or "Rain" in *Della Primavera Trasportata Al Morale* (1930).



II

The Voice of the Office

good morning Mister Zuckor—
good morning——

good morning Mister Zuckor—
good morning——

hello Jacobs—
hello—got a *Times*—
yes here ’tis——

good morning Mister Zuckor—
good morning—

and at the fourth hole there’s a hazard some hazard I tell you the par for that hole is good morning Zuckor five and what do you think I did it in

hello Michelet what did you do last night
oh nothing was with a Jane
anything happen

13

The Office

what do you think
good morning Mister Zuckor
good morning
hello Kranz
good morning Mister Read

diling-dling-ling-ing-ng-ng-g

hello yes sir what’s that yes sir buy twenty-four Empire Gas at the market I will sir yes sir as soon as the market opens right

good morning Mister Zuckor

and I made it in eighty-seven and the par for that course is hey Jacobs don’t forget that order in Steel

no sir

zim-m-m-m-m-m

hello yes sir no the market has not opened yet sir right I’ll call you Kranz call the Broadway National at the opening

couldn’t do a thing with her she said no no I don’t do it what would you do with her

good morning Mister Zuckor

14

The Voice of the Office

you’ll have to come down earlier than this we can’t have you people coming at every hour

zing-ing-ing-ng-g-g

finest rum in the country hello yes sir oh hello Doran what you couldn’t sell it I’m sorry old boy yes I’ll do anything I can right Michelet get the opening on Standard Steel for Doran Squibs

yes Mister Read I guess I’ll drop her there’s nothing doing

hey Glymmer I see where Federal Tel went up to par I guess we can let go a few Jacobs get the market on Federal Tel

dung-g

market open open Steel nine and three-quarters Blue Hill unchanged

buy one hundred Steel at nine and a half

right buy a hundred Steel at nine and a half right Cotton Goods six and an eighth Atlantic Power a quarter hello right

15

FIGURE 5: The first three pages in “The Voice of the Office.”

Standardized greetings, shortened names (‘*Times*’ for *New York Times*) as well as contractions (“tis’) indicate already on the first page of “The Voice” that (verbal) economy is paramount at Glymmer, Read & Co. Lines such as ‘hello yes sir no the market has not opened yet right I’ll call you Kranz call the Broadway National at the opening’ substantiate this impression because they arrange speech acts in immediate succession, conveying that Zuckor operates with remarkable speed. Certainly, the narrative records only Zuckor’s part of the telephone conversation, so the immediate succession of his utterances does not necessarily represent an economized portrayal. It nevertheless indicates that Zuckor utters these speech acts quickly, one after the other, and that he barely requires any time to receive a request over the telephone, hang up and pass the task on to his colleague. Adding to this syntactic evocation of high-speed acting, the printed speech acts as such reveal that Zuckor has economized his business jargon to the utmost: He gives one- or two-word answers (‘yes sir,’ ‘no,’ ‘right’) and uses the address formula ‘Hello,’ which had been established by Thomas Edison as a “more efficient alternative to ‘Are you there?’ or ‘Are you ready to talk?’” in the late nineteenth century (Grimes).[241]

When the market opens half-way through page fifteen, the textual *Takt* of “The Voice” increases: The printed market analyses and trading commands are stripped of superfluous words; they form a terse vertical sequence of short paragraphs on the page. Every action in this scene is based on speed: the assessment of current stock prizes, the orders that are given and, finally, their quick execution. On the following page, a stylistic rendering of the auditory stimulus that emanates from the stock ticker accentuates the temporal regime to which Zuckor’s trading activity responds: “tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik-tik” (*Office* 16). This line evokes the “New Pulse” of American business, which the *Wall Street Journal* celebrated as an American achievement in technical acceleration, made possible by innovations in tele-communication, in 1906: "In no other financial centre in the word has the mechanical side of the operations been so highly developed. In [...] its many devices for bringing thousands of operators into incessant communication with one another it has no rival. [...] [O]n every business day this vast mechanism is tirelessly in action" ("Wall Street's New Pulse" 6). Stylistically and rhetorically, "The Voice" presents itself as a literary tribute to technologically accelerated office efficiency on Wall Street.

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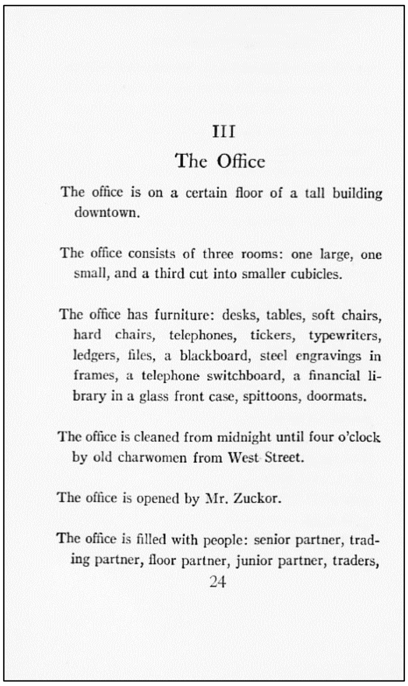
[241] The word ‘hello’ originally derives from the “call to incite hounds to the chase,” as William Grimes points out.

Correspondingly, the third and last experimental text in *The Office*'s first section confronts the reader with another fast representation of the eponymous office (see figure 6). Conceived in a Whitmanesque free-verse style, this text is composed of twenty-one short 'stanzas.'[242] The modern quality of the text comes into relief in the declarative sentences that constitute the individual paragraphs: each of these is pared-down to a minimum length and conceived in exact, reduced wording. In anaphoric fashion, each begins with the words "The office" and, in the following, provides facts about some particular facet of Glymmer, Read and Co. Albeit in a less radical manner than in "Wall Street" or "The Voice," stylistic and formal experiments are used here to evoke the fast temporal order of metropolitan business. Enumerations and lists, as they occur in the second and third stanzas for instance, accelerate the *Takt* of the text. They embed within it sequences of constant change. Meanwhile, the parallel construction of relatively short statements, which are separated as distinct 'stanzas,' implements a fast *Takt* on the level of form.



III

The Office

The office is on a certain floor of a tall building downtown.

The office consists of three rooms: one large, one small, and a third cut into smaller cubicles.

The office has furniture: desks, tables, soft chairs, hard chairs, telephones, tickers, typewriters, ledgers, files, a blackboard, steel engravings in frames, a telephone switchboard, a financial library in a glass front case, spittoons, doormats.

The office is cleaned from midnight until four o'clock by old charwomen from West Street.

The office is opened by Mr. Zuckor.

The office is filled with people: senior partner, trading partner, floor partner, junior partner, traders,

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FIGURE 6: The first page of "The Office" in Asch's *The Office.*

As these exemplary close readings of the three experimental texts in the first section of Asch's novel reveal, *The Office* initially exhibits its own experimental quality, inviting the reader to recognize it as an example of modern American avant-garde writing. Against this backdrop, it is certainly not surprising that some reviewers compared *The Office* favorably to acclaimed modernist masterpieces such as *Manhattan Transfer*.

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[242] I use the term stanzas here because the first lines of each distinct passage are not indented, as it is the case in "Wall Street" and "The Voice." Instead, a hanging indentation is used here, as common in printed free-verse poetry.

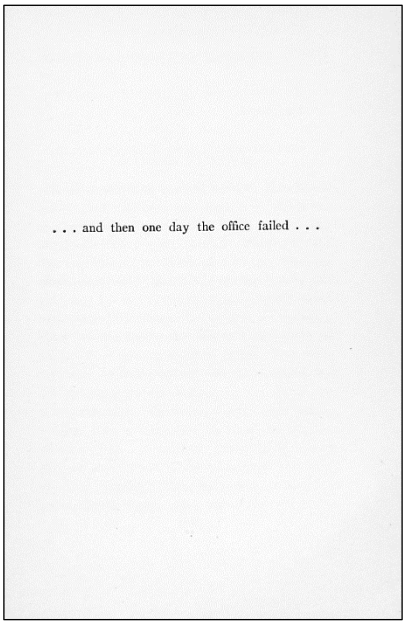
. . . and then one day the office failed . . .

FIGURE 7: Declaration of failure at the transition from section one to section two

This initial, conspicuous compliance with the norms and imperatives of the day, however, turns out to be part of a greater, counter-discursive scheme in Asch's novel. It provides the foundation upon which a critical diagnosis, an affective aesthetic of in-betweenness as well as a visionary proposition for remedy are built in the novel's second section. The sudden failure of Glymmer, Read & Co. is another crucial element in this larger scheme. An almost blank page bearing the line "… and then one day the office failed …" divides section one and two (see figure 7). This page and this event bring the rush of velocity in the office (as a time-space in the story world) and in *The Office* (as literary chronotope) to a sudden halt. The three full stops at either end of the statement indicate that time is passing, yet the nearly blank page as such evokes only a void of immobility, inactivity and indeterminacy. In this experimental narrative, which rushes forward unstoppably until this point, such a void invites speculation: Why has the office failed? How will the employees react? Does the failure have fatal consequences for them? No answers are given at this point, yet the fourteen stories in the novel's second section do just that. On 236 pages and in a markedly decelerated style, they tell the stories of fourteen individuals (or small groups) who are affected by the failure. The editor of *The Neglected Books Page* is right to draw attention to the fact that "Asch shows a remarkable talent for bringing out depths in his characters with the slightest and subtlest of strokes. Although much of *The Office* brings to mind the works of his contemporary, John Dos Passos [...], Asch is much more actively engaged in creating three-dimensional characters" ("The Office, by Nathan Asch").

Both individually and in interaction with one another, the fourteen stories in *The Office*'s second section confront the reader with an ethical critique of acceleration: Referencing an alternative ideal of 'the good life,' they present critical diagnoses that draw attention to various forms of alienation which result from people's adaptation to (i.e., synchronization with) the temporal regime of modern business. Many of these stories furthermore demonstrate to the reader that the failure may awaken individuals to the detrimental effects of their synchronized lives, animating them to apply the coping mechanisms that various characters adopt to make speed more livable. These generative dimensions in Asch's novel mark it as a second exemplar of an alternate practice of modern American prose writing.

A radically different, allegedly outdated style and narrative mode is used in the second section of *The Office*. This subtly indicates that experimental, fast texts, as they occur in the novel's first section, have only a limited capacity to transmit a critique. Only if the first section is read in the awareness that *The Office* is a counter-discursive novel, the subtle critical undercurrents that run through "Wall Street," "The Voice," and "The Office" will come into view. Otherwise, it is likely that they remain unnoticed. The second 'paragraph' of the prose poem "Wall Street," for instance, negates that the metropolis is a physical structure that accommodates the circulation of men and business well: The streets are not as long-stretching, straight, broad and well-lit, as city planners claimed they would become (see chapter II.B.1). They are "short – crooked – narrow – dark." The third 'paragraph' of "Wall Street" elucidates the lifestyles that such an environment engenders: an inescapable confinement in a mass of people ("crowded"), a frantic movement ("teeming") and an integration with the dominant flows of the mass ("undulating") – a form of human life, finally, which is marked by decay ("festering") (*Office* 9). "The Voice" subtly addresses the negative effects of high-speed, tele-communicated trading: Its dense record of auditory stimulants might be read as an indication that Zuckor is under constant stress and time pressure as well as deprived of personal agency. His economized, technologically transmitted communication as well as his harsh way of scolding others who (re)act too slowly (cf. *Office* 16) might be identified as socially alienating practices. This openness for interpretation is inherent in all experimental fiction that eradicates reader guidance – a fact that might have led ambitions writers of the day to inform readers about the approaches and the receptive effects they favored their paratexts (see chapter II.C).

In Asch's novel, a mechanism of disillusionment is implemented at the end of "The Office" to alert the reader to the novel's counter-discursive stance. The statements become considerably shorter, thus once again accelerating the textual *Takt* to evoke the temporality of technologically mediated trading. They come to resemble a chant of truisms about the employees' existential dependency on a capitalist institution: "The office is the scene of all its employees' hopes. / The office is the most important thing these people think about. / The office is the reason of these people's existence" (*Office* 26). This chant does not lead toward a sense of (spiritual) fulfillment, however. It terminates as a prophesy of doom: "The office can stop and these people will die" (26). This closing line abruptly posits that an existential dependence on a capitalist institution such as the office is not a route toward success and wellbeing but is potentially lethal. Suddenly, the reader is confronted with this prophesy, which runs counter to the logic of acceleration and progress that *The Office* conveys up to this point. This prophesy launches the novel's counter-discursive re-negotiation of acceleration on individual and social life in metropolitan settings.

The fourteen stories that follow in *The Office* do not confirm that the failure of Glymmer, Read & Co. as such is lethal. Nevertheless, they reveal that people who fix their attention upon the office, project all of their hopes on it and dedicate their whole lives to it become alienated in various ways. This critical diagnostic assessment of modern speed, which unfolds in the second section of Asch's novel, explains why the chapter count not only begins anew but 'progresses' from Roman numerals to Arabic numerals at the transition from the first to the second section: it marks a new beginning, a new way of dealing with acceleration in modern America – and in modern American letters.

THE ASSETS OF 'FAILURE:' *THE OFFICE*'S ETHICAL CRITIQUE IN SECTION TWO

At the transition from the first to the second section, *The Office* metamorphoses into a critical diagnostic assessment of hyper-accelerated life and work in the metropolis. At this point, the novel's hybrid conception (i.e., its combination of 'new/fast' and 'old/slow' styles and narrative modes) manifests itself. At the same time, the novel's underlying generative agenda comes into view in the way individual stories negotiate possibilities for change that present themselves to the white-collar workers who are affected by the failure as well as in the affirmative manner in which those characters are portrayed who develop a critical awareness and (partly or wholly) emancipate themselves from the regime of speed.

Suddenly, stories are being told in Asch's novel. It becomes clear that *The Office* follows a logic of deceleration instead of acceleration. For nine times as many pages as in section one, Asch's narrative now turns away from the rush of the modern business world, re-focuses on former employees and rehabilitates slower modes of storytelling. At the time, William James and Georg Simmel noted that "[o]ur sense of time, like other senses, seem subject to the law of contrast," so the "farther the sensation of a new stimulus deviates from the original state of that sensation, the stronger and the more obviously will we become conscious of it" (James 618; Simmel, *Philosophy* 266). *The Office*'s formal conception seems to be based on a similar idea: With its sudden shift to 'slow' character portraits in section two, it creates a stylistic and narratological rupture that appears specially designed to disillusion the reader. As the textual design abruptly terminates the possibility for readerly immersion in the world of speed, the reader's attention is drawn toward the temporality of the literary text. Here and in the following, he is prompted to re-negotiate American 'narratives' that celebrate speed in content in style by asking: which impact do fast and slow literary styles have on the act and experience of reading and which impact do fast and slow life styles have on individual and social life?

LAUNCHING THE ETHICAL CRITIQUE: "GERTRUDE DONOVAN" AND "ONE OF THE CLERKS"

The first two stories in the second part support this because they confront the reader with critical assessments of modern office life. They resemble sociological diagnoses of the day, which "often described" the "urban mode of life [...] as consisting of the substitution of secondary for primary contacts, the weakening of bonds of kinship, and the declining social significance of the family

[...] and the undermining of the traditional basis of social solidarity" (Wirth 20–21). While "Gertrude Donovan" (story 1) portrays social alienation as a result of synchronized living on Wall Street, "One of the Clerks" (story 2) presents a diagnosis which Rosa identifies as an insight that informs ethical critiques of acceleration: Modernity's "promise of *autonomy*," hence of a "sense of ethical self-determination" and liberation from any "restrictions to a self-determined life," proves to be false (*Alienation* 78).

"Gertrude Donovan" is told from the perspective of a protagonist who has worked as a stenographer at Glymmer, Read & Co. The narrative opens with Gertrude's reflections about being forced to find a new job:

> Then the call at the [new] office. The manager would first look at her legs, then at her neck. He would measure her with his eyes. The old look. She tried to picture the new boss. Fat? Thin? Good looking? Will he try to get fresh? [...] It's no fun to be looking for a new job every day. Just as you get started, and the clerks stop looking at you as if you were lying naked, you've got to give it all up and start all over again. (29-30)

Right at the outset of section two, this passage draws the reader's attention not only the unusually high frequency at which individuals such as Gertrude (are compelled to) change their place of employment. Simultaneously, it moves the changed patterns of heterosexual interaction into focus. The quoted passage communicates that the male workforce in business settings commonly perceives of women as a thrilling diversion. It suggests that male workers only take interest in Gertrude's physical features (legs and neck) as well as in the erotic potential she represents in their eyes ('looking at you as if you were lying naked').[243] Since a figural narrative situation is employed, however, the reader simultaneously encounters Gertrude's own attitude: The 'female gaze' of the stenographer indeed perfectly replicates the evaluative, leering 'male gaze:' Gertrude shows interest only in her new employer's physical attractiveness as well as in the possibility of a quick, exciting flirt ('Fat? Thin? Good looking? Will he try to get fresh?'). This portrayal provides the basis for an ethical critique of hyper-accelerated heterosexual courtship to emerge in the remainder of "Gertrude Donovan:" Since 'successfully' synchronized individuals do not go through the "time-consuming" process of building "deep relations," they become socially alienated (Rosa, *Alienation* 96).

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[243] A subtler version of this critique already occurs in "The Voice." Here, the portrayal of Zuckor's interaction with the opposite sex reveals that these exchanges are dominated by a time-economy, which fosters social alienation. When Zuckor is compelled to wait when calling another office, he uses the time he would otherwise 'lose' waiting to obtain a momentarily thrilling diversion from female switchboard operators: "all right I'll wait how's your heart is that so coming out with me no I'll be nice you don't know how nice I can be hello Mister Rolland Sugar six yes" (16–17). Zuckor's small talk seems almost sympathetic at first glance. Since "The Voice" includes an almost identical, yet even shorter exchange with another operator at Rolland's office (cf. 20), however, it marks Zuckor's act as a tactic to entice women in a shallow and time-economic way: He puts on an air of intimacy and providence in order to increase his chances of an immediate return (a date). This reading is supported by the fact that Zuckor instantly redirects his attention toward a different kind of 'sugar transaction' when his business associate Rolland becomes available.

From the second page onward, the narrative repeatedly emphasizes the nexus of acceleration, modern business and social alienation:

> Her hands began automatically to hit the keys. [...] Her hand momentarily stopped typing, and touched her hair; [...] It was getting loose. They charged you twenty dollars, and it didn't last more than a month. She took out her powder puff and powdered herself, twisting her lower lip over the upper and blowing at her nose. (*Office* 30)

The quoted passage emphasizes that Gertrude has perfectly internalized the operational speed of modern business as well as the *Takt* of modern courtship, which depends upon regular (monthly or daily) beauty updates. The narrative identifies such accelerated, habitual acts as the source of social alienation. For instance, it shows that Gertrude considers an ongoing sequence of momentary thrills in male-female interaction as the norm.[244] Harry Widener, junior partner at the firm and Gertrude's object of desire, regularly satisfies Gertrude's craving for excitement by his mere presence: "He did not come to the office often [...] [b]ut sometimes he did come, and she knew he would, and it was enough. He was a rare drug she needed but seldom, but without which she felt she could not live" (*Office* 37). The sense that the distance between the designated lovers will not and should not, in Gertrude's mind, be overcome, transpires already in this sentence. The young stenographer is portrayed as an individual who is looking only for the noncommittal, never-ending chase: The reader learns that she craves the thrill of flirtation,[245] yet is "satisfied, even gratified" by Harry, with whom she can, "for however a fleeting moment, [feel that] a union had been accomplished" (*Office* 36). These quotes illustrate the critical diagnostic mode that marks the alternate practice of modern American prose writing, as it registers in Frank's and Asch's prose: They suggest that forms of social interaction have been negatively impacted by the fact that the modern office exists as a non-place (or 'space'), which is "formed in relation to certain ends" (here fast commerce) only – not as a place that is "relational, historical and concerned with identity" (Augé 76, 63).[246] According to Asch's narrative, modern individuals such as Gertrude minimize their social involvement to the lowest degree possible ('without which she felt she could not live') and contend themselves with momentary encounters that make them feel as though they have established a 'unity' with another person. The critical diagnosis of Asch's novel resembles the one formulated by the sociologist Ernest W. Burgess, who addresses the problematic "drive toward casual association, with the added piquancy of adventure and irresponsibility" in urban communities in his 1926 preface to the collection *The Urban Community*

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[244] Doing so, *The Office* offers a much more comprehensive analysis of social alienation's causes of in modern America than Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* or "The Man's Story" do. The latter presents the protagonist's vague and pessimistic notion "that men had erected walls about themselves [...] and now stood behind them, knowing dimly that beyond the walls there was warmth, light, air, beauty, life, in fact – while at the same time, and because of a kind of madness in themselves, the walls were constantly being built higher and stronger" (*Horses and Men* 127–28).

[245] Consider the following passage: "quick, or it'll be too late. Hurry. Hurry. He's looking up. He's looking" (*Office* 39).

[246] For a definition of Marc Augé's concept, see chapter III.A.2.

("Preface" xvii). The philosopher John Dewey, too, underlines in his seminal work *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) that "attachments [...] are bred in tranquil stability; they are nourished in constant relationships. Acceleration of mobility disturbs them at their root" (322). In "Gertrude Donovan," the practice of courtship is similarly identified as just another diversion that provides individuals with thrilling *Erlebnisse* and gives them the feeling that they maintain a high speed of life. Since these forms of courtship never aim to produce any deep and durable relationships, however, they further social alienation.

On the basis of this critical diagnosis, "Gertrude Donovan" introduces a vision of a 'good life:' Gertrude secretly longs for the "something personal" and the deep connection, which she projects upon every encounter with Harry. The daydream, a common plot element in sentimental fictions, is rehabilitated at this point in the narrative to elaborate this vision: "She closed her eyes, and [...] saw Harry Widener. He was looking at her, and she was looking at him. He was saying to her: 'You are with me now and you are quiet.' And she answered to him, 'Yes, I am quiet.' And they sat there in the darkness, she feeling his odor, and lulled to sleep by it" (49). This daydream clashes with Gertrude's actual interactive practice on more than one level: It entails a drawn-out moment of intimacy between Harry and Gertrude, during which they recognize one another simultaneously and (verbally) establish a union that lasts longer than a fleeting moment. In analogy to Frank's definition of 'unity,' Asch's narrative identifies such a union as a state of quietude, that is, a state of deceleration free from actions and sensual *Erlebnisse* (thrills or external disturbances) that clashes with the pace of life at the office, as it is evoked in "The Voice." In this decelerated state, an emotional as well as a physical union materializes between two individuals ('feeling his odor'), which in turn transforms their existence of driven alertness into an essentially regenerative state of safety and relaxation ('lulled to sleep'). Gertrude's daydream further accentuates the deficits of hyper-accelerated lifestyles and it introduces an alternate vision of 'the good life' – a vision that hinges on the value of slowness, which both Asch's and Frank's novels promote. The thirteen stories that follow "Gertrude Donovan" are designed to familiarize the reader with this vision.

In the remarkably comprehensive analysis of acceleration's long-term effects that Asch's novel offers in the first story of section two, however, it furthermore already transpires that Gertrude will hardly ever realize her dream since "something within her said that if he [Harry] did [actually approach her in the office], there would be a complete divorce of their spirits" (*Office* 36). The portrayal of Gertrude's relation to her suitor Jim Denby verifies this notion. In contrast to Harry, Jim's presence does no longer excite Gertrude. The reason is that she has known him "for a long time" (*Office* 36). What is more, Jim refuses to join the thrilling modern game of chase Gertrude likes to play: He declares that he wishes to marry her. "If he'd be a man," a 'normal' business man on to a quick fling in the novel's logic, "he wouldn't come around me," Gertrude resolves, "He'd stop bothering me. Can't he see that I don't want him and his protecting" (*Office* 46)? Internal monologues such as this one illustrate Gertrude's self-centered attitude and they draw attention to the fact that Jim's wish to enter a durable and committed relationship triggers reproach in Gertrude because it threatens to deprive her of the thrill of flirtation and to slow down her pace of life. It appears that a 'divorce of spirits' inevitably occurs when the time-conscious Gertrude faces the threat of being confined in a durable heterosexual relationship, in which intimacy and commitment replace the thrill of courtship. As long as Gertrude remains unable to overcome her urge to keep up with the modern pace of life and love, to which she has grown accustomed since her childhood,[247] she will not be able to attain the devotion and quiet togetherness for which she secretly longs – this is the understanding imparted by "Gertrude Donovan."

Later in the novel, the story about "Harry Widener" (story 10), Gertrude's object of desire, reiterates the notion that modern individuals need to overcome their accustomed behavior and need to rehabilitate slower forms of interaction. Initially, however, the story "One of the Clerks" (story 2) substantiates "Gertrude Donovan"'s ethical critique of accelerated life by offering an insight into the process of adaptation which people undergo on Wall Street.

The story's opening renegotiates the office failure through the perspective of a nameless clerk, illustrating that the bankruptcy helps the clerk to develop a critical outlook on his life on Wall Street. The narrative appears markedly accelerated in order to express the mental state of agitated "helplessness" that "swept" the clerk upon losing his job at Glymmer, Read & Co. (*Office* 56). In comparison to Williams' *Great American Novel,* a slightly slower narrative mode – the stream of consciousness – is used in Asch's novel at this point to convey the clerk's emotional state. Instead of jumping from novelty to novelty, as Williams' prose improvisations do, the experimental narrative in "One of the Clerks" traces the protagonist's thoughts as they unfold in a coherent manner:

> And if it isn't hell to work for the same firm eight years, to give all you've got, all this time, to work as hard as you can all the period, never letting go, never taking it easy, for the whole eight years never once missing a day of work, or coming late, [...] just one thing in mind: work, work, work; [...] and you all the time trying to show them that you're worthy of advancement; that all you want is a chance to prove it, that you've given up everything in the world in order to prove it, that your mind's on business and on nothing else, and then, when you've finally almost proven it [...], and when you finally feel you're getting out of the

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[247] The following passage indicates that Gertrude's 'norm' of romantic relations emerged in synchrony with modern entertainment and consumption: "This was her neighborhood, where she had been born, brought up. Here was the motion picture house, 'The Lakewood,' [...] when she entered high school, she used to come here every night, and in a corner, [...] she would sit with a neighborhood boy and mush: kiss, and soul kiss, and hold [...]. And there was the ice-cream parlor, 'Gunn's,' [...] [where] after the movies she used to come here with friends, and they would gorge themselves with ice cream [...] until their mouths would become like acid, from too many sweets" (*Office* 40-41).

> rut, then … to have the whole God damned thing take a jump and go bankrupt, and if that isn't hell, what in hell is it? (54-55)

The clerk's stream of consciousness unstoppably rushes forth across two pages. This cascade of thoughts does not express the mental speed that Williams celebrates in his preface to *Kora* (see chapter II.C.1). Instead, it evokes the clerk's emotional state: His agitated frustration about the fact that the promise of acceleration (success, control, independence) has not materialized for him even though he has 'successfully' adjusted his life's pace to the speed of modern business ('work, work, work'). His achievements have fallen prey to the unpredictable changes that occur incessantly in the age of speed.

As "One of the Clerks" continues, the narrative adopts a figural narrative situation. Carefully worded sentences indicate that the clerk's rapid mental operation after the failure differs from the mental speed of efficient office workers, who aim to settle a task or issue as quickly as possible. This different form of mental speed generates a critical awareness in the clerk, which distinguishes him from adapted white-collar workers: "He was walking up Broadway with his usual stride, short, nervous steps, with the arms jerking at the sides, but the *inner feeling* did not communicate with this appearance. [...] He felt himself unequal in the crowd, to this human avalanche that, curving and undulating, swept the sidewalk" (*Office* 58, emphasis added). This passage establishes two important facts: The clerk's bodily movement (steps and jerking arms) stays in sync with the *Takt* of city life, uniting his body with the synchronized 'avalanche' of the metropolitan crowd. Inside the clerk, however, an emotion arises that runs counter to this external adaptation. This very emotion – a feeling of agitation and indignation that holds a revolutionary potential – is evoked by the stream of consciousness which opens "One of the Clerks" as well. As a result, the opening constitutes a subversive use of textual speed-up that aims to sensitize the reader to the fact that the failure liberates the clerk's mental activity: his mind moves freely in the act of critical thinking. Just as *City Block*'s first story on Clarence Lipper, this early story in *The Office* confronts the reader with a modern individual who begins to think differently.

In both of these stories, the male protagonist is the first character to reinstall compassion, fairness and deceleration as alternate values. These values transpire in the clerk's assessment of social life on Wall Street, as the following passage demonstrates:

> If you want to be a success in business, you've got to be hard, you've got no right to look at the other guy's crying; you can't sympathize with him, and if he's ahead of you, you've got to trip him and make him fall and get in his place, and if he's below you, you just have to forget him, because if you stop for one minute, it'll be too late; you'll never get a chance to catch up. (59)

This critical analysis of American business underscores that 'the social' (i.e., sympathy, fairness, sharing, etc.) has been eradicated and has been replaced by ruthless competition, which results from everyone's ambition to 'succeed' in the never-ending race for recognition. Instead of revealing that individuals may gain prestige and glory by racing ahead (i.e., fulfill the promise of acceleration), the clerk's analysis describes the dire consequences of such an act. Thereby, it refutes those qualities and accomplishments that commonly mark an individual as 'successful,' identifying them as essentially deleterious for individual and social life. It moreover subtly introduces the alternate values of sympathy, fairness and sharing. By combining a narrative perspective that creates empathy with a reliable narrator and communicates a critique of fast, 'successful' living, "One of the Clerks" invites the reader to thrust aside deceptive tales of speed and success, to liberate herself from the imperative of acceleration and to reflect as critically on the negative repercussions of accelerated living and working as the clerk.

The long quote from the story's opening already indicates that "One of the Clerks" furthermore addresses the problem that a constant acceleration of life's pace cannot provide individuals with the planning certainty, self-determination and monetary security, which the clerk desires to attain (cf. *Office* 56). Another scene portrays the clerk sitting in a diner, observing the speed at which people around him are "[t]alking, eating, paying, walking out." In this moment, the clerk realizes that these people have stopped trying to chase the ideal he still pursues. To protect themselves while trying to keep afloat in the metropolitan stream of change, they have adopted an attitude of indifference and resignation: "They didn't care. [...] They believed in now, not in then. They lived now. [...] They had been weak and had given up. The fight had been too hard for them" (*Office* 63–64). This comment suggests that the feeling of self-determination is not likely to materialize for modern city dwellers if their lives are affected by the unpredictable changes that take place in their lifeworld at all times. To survive, people living and working in the metropolis abandon their attempt to attain long-term security, a sense of self and self-directedness. They let themselves be dominated by the (temporal) regimes of business life – simply let the avalanche of metropolitan life push them forth.[248] Modernity's promise of self-determination and security, on which the clerk based his aspiration for efficient acting and progress, proves to be false.

As these close readings reveal, "One of the Clerks" is designed to reveal to the reader that Glymmer, Read & Co.'s bankruptcy awakens the clerk to the fact that his blind compliance with the imperatives of American business has not liberated him but has made him subject to the unpredictable changes that occur constantly in the metropolitan story world. Ideologically, "One of the Clerks" can be compared to the critical texts by Southern Agrarians such as John Crowe Ransom. In 1930, Ransom writes in the essay "Reconstructed but Unregenerate" that "[w]e alone have devoted our lives to ideals which are admirable within their proper limits, but which expose us to slavery when pursued without critical intelligence" (10). In "One of the Clerks," the protagonist gains a similar understanding, which impels him to search for a way to reintroduce compassion, self-determination and security into his life. Since he is only an insignificant, "alone and helpless" oppositionist who tilts against the ever-turning windmill of the synchronized urban mass, however, the clerk seems unable to succeed in this endeavor. While he "walked slower" through the streets, everyone else is "hurrying home from the office" (*Office* 67). In his desperate mindset, the clerk almost lets himself be enticed by the US Navy's recruitment slogan, which promises to supply him with safe employment and income as well as with physical comfort and comradeship: "Learn a trade. No worrying [...]. So much a month. [...] Just eat as much as you want. No pushing, no trying to push another guy out" (*Office* 68). As an officer leads him into the recruitment office by the arm, however, the clerk realizes that enlisting will subject him to an even stronger form of external domination. Shouting "No!," he runs back into the street (*Office* 69). This last scene disqualifies the Navy as an alternative. At the end of the story, the clerk is disillusioned, yet he sees no possibility to actualize his ideal of a 'good life' within the strong regulative environment of the modern city (and beyond).

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[248] A similar diagnosis was presented by the sociologist Louis Wirth in 1938: "The heightened mobility of the individual, which [...] subjects him to fluctuating status in the differentiated social groups that compose the social structure of the city, tends toward the acceptance of instability and insecurity in the world at large as a norm" ("Urbanism" 16).

These readings demonstrate that the two stories which open *City Block*'s second section clash with the three experimental speed-narratives in section one on multiple levels. Not only is their style markedly decelerated. They moreover present a counter-discursive assessment of modern city life, which operates at eye-level to convey the feelings and thoughts of the respective protagonist to the reader. A critical diagnostic mode marks these two stories: Both of them detail the negative ramifications of accelerated living. What is more, they introduce the reader to an alternate vision of modern life as well as to an alternate value system, which other stories in *The Office* promote, too: Gertrude Donovan daydreams about a durable, deeply emotional relationship and the clerk is determined to regain a life of security, self-determination, sociability and fairness.

SECULAR PROPHETS IN *THE OFFICE*: "MARC KRANZ" AND "HENRY CLARKE"

"Gertrude Donovan" and "One of the Clerks" are designed to make the reader susceptible to the vision of a 'good life,' which is presented more clearly and more comprehensively to the reader in the stories "Marc Kranz" (story 4) and "Henry Clarke" (story 7). These two stories tell the tales of two secular "prophet[s]" of alternate living in modern America (*Office* 102): Marc and Henry emancipate their existences from the *Takt* of office work after the bankruptcy and seize alternative lifestyles that make life worth living, as the respective portrayal suggests. Both of these stories function as visionary 'anchor stories' in *The Office* since all remaining stories in section two relate back to them in one way or the other.[249] Regardless of whether these latter stories celebrate individuals who begin to transform their lives or comment critically on characters who remain caught up in their hyper-accelerated ways, they reinforce the vision of a 'good life' that is spelled out in the anchor stories: All of them stress that modern individuals need to, first, acknowledge the detrimental effects of their synchronized lives and, then, find the strength to, at least momentarily, break free from the temporal regime that dominates institutional structures such as the office as well as their own lives. Only by doing so will they be able to live gratifying lives in modern America.

Story number four, entitled "Marc Kranz," has a key function in *The Office*. Positioned after "Gertrude Donovan" and "One of the Clerks," it is the first story to present an individual who manages to implement an alternate form of existence (i.e., a 'better life') after the office has failed. Marc works for Glymmer, Read & Co., yet writes poetry in his spare time. When the firm fails and Marc becomes aware of the suffering that his work has caused, he envisions an alternate way of existing in the world of speed and alters his conception of modern writing accordingly.

There is no religious dimension attached to the label 'prophet' in Asch's novel. Nonetheless, Marc's story is constructed as a secular tale of enlightenment in order to maximize its potential to disillusion the reader and to animate him to follow the prophet's example. The first pages introduce the protagonist as an individual who has come to function smoothly within the temporal super-structure of urban business. Marc succeeds as a reckless agent who sells bonds to private investors, convincing them, with "[h]oneyed tongue," to put their savings at risk on the stock market (*Office* 94). Even if he is presented as an individual who sees through the behavior of his fellow clerks, who are "[t]rying to deepen their shallowness" with naive jokes (*Office* 88), or of strange women who casually seek to seduce him in public,[250] Marc is an enthusiast of modernity. Notably, the narrative reveals that this attitude informs Marc's writing practice as well. The descriptions of Marc's practice establish clear analogies to contemporary, critically acclaimed experiments in textual speed-up: it is inspired by the "exuberant" *Erlebnis* of living "in the shadow of the great masses of steel and marble, among other people that hurried" through the metropolis (*Office* 91, 92). Marc's 'pure' poems reproduce "things as they are. As they must be," for instance how "the blood beats faster to the tune of a ticker" (*Office* 92). These descriptions identify Marc as a perfectly adapted American artist, who perceives the technological speed of the ticker as an inspiring sensory thrill and who willingly, even enthusiastically, subjects every aspect of his life and work to the metropolitan temporal order. On yet another level, "Marc

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[249] These intra-textual references will be addressed in the analyses of the individual stories.

[250] On the train, a "girl showed more of her flesh-colored stocking and, as if unconcernedly, looked at him to see the effect" (Asch, *Office* 89).

Kranz" stylizes the protagonist as a conformist. A fast style is used in passages that convey Marc's fascination with modern speed:

> He was on West Street now among the docks crowded with ships and with merchandise. Around him great motor trucks. Wagons with tremendous horses. Drivers swearing. People shouting. The smell of goods, of water, and of ships mixed with the stench of horse dung. It exhilarated him. [...] And fascinated he watched, and through his mind ran a rhapsody of strength and speed. (*Office* 95-96)

Techniques of textual speed-up evoke Marc's exhilaration upon encountering the great dynamic of metropolitan trade, more specifically, the manifold stimulants that New York's harbor generates for the onlooker. Following a sentence that introduces the location, four short sentences record the distinct sensory stimuli that attract Marc's attention while he watches the scene. The third and fourth sentences are even shorter than the first two; they reproduce the speed at which sounds stimulate Marc's sensorium and they register his excitement. For the same purpose, the sentence that follows enumerates the odors Marc encounters in short sub clauses. This intensive *Erlebnis* of modern trade, the quoted account suggests, affects the poet's mind: It 'ran' at top speed, producing in Marc a feeling of euphoria which the reader is invited to relive.

The narrative in "Marc Kranz," however, does not endorse Marc's enthusiasm but it elucidates that it goes hand in hand with a reckless approach to business as well as with an egocentric indifference towards the ways in which modern trading impacts people's lives. When the office fails, Marc shows no sense of guilt, let alone a sense of compassion, for his clients, who face financial ruin: "Sentiment. Why should he care whether Volpe's wife ate? Or even Volpe's children? [...] He was no charity organization. Nor was he a philanthropist. He wanted to write and needed to support himself while doing it. The end justifies the means" (*Office* 95). The narrative challenges Marc's last statement by drawing attention to the fact that Volpe has a wife and children and by portraying Volpe's desperation at learning that his life's savings have been lost in the uncontrollable torrent of the market. The fact that Marc calls Volpe's financial ruin "just a little unpleasantness" (*Office* 93) strengthens the novel's potential to foster a critical awareness in the reader. "Marc Kranz" confronts her with a 'successfully' adapted, but socially alienated white-collar worker who is callously indifferent towards other people: Volpe's suffering does not affect Marc because he is only of importance to him as a client. The 'person' Volpe does not concern the "purely intellectualistic person" Marc, to use Simmel's phrase ("Metropolis" 12). Through the characterization of Marc, the reader is confronted with the impact that hyper-accelerated living might have on individual and social life in urban America: callousness and social alienation.[251]

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[251] For a similar critique by Toomer, see the unpublished story "Drackman," in which the lack of an "adequate development of a sense of responsibility" in the "Iron Man" businessman Daniel Drackman comes under attack (121).

The narrative ends by promoting deceleration as an essential of the 'good existence' to which Marc finally aspires. "As he sat there [...] watching the city resting, he wondered whether he meant all this. [...] Whether the accomplishment of many was worth the suffering of a few [...] who in a crowd counted for nothing." "The thing shouldn't be. It was. But it shouldn't" (*Office* 96-97, 98). The quoted sentences indicate that a moment of decelerated reflection yields a feeling of doubt in Marc, which evolves into a moment of enlightenment: While "pondering" extensively in distanced repose after the failure, Marc gains a critical perspective on his own business attitude and he begins to delineate a set of alternate values:

> He didn't want to starve, be one of those long and pale-faced shadows [...]. Did they see little George and Volpe's children? Did it annoy them? Could they enjoy themselves while seeing them? They could. They had [...] no power to feel what others felt. It was he who could feel those things [...]. (*Office* 99)

Marc's reflection identifies a 'successful' assimilation to modern business as an essentially harmful state that impacts people's physical health ('starved,' 'pale-faced') and eradicates in them the capacity to feel compassion and to engage in critical thinking ('no power to feel,' 'did it annoy them?'). Marc is now portrayed as a visionary who is able to criticize and reject this state; a visionary who has begun to base his judgements and actions on the alternate values of self-determinacy, emotionality and compassion as well as (mental/physical) health. In the following, the reader is acquainted with the vision of a 'better' modern life – and a 'better' modern practice of writing that Marc develops with these alternate values in mind. As a compassionate human being, he wishes to find a position in the city from which he can observe the metropolis as though "from far off, objectively, not mixed in it" (*Office* 100). In this very position, which is simultaneously close to and independent ('objective') of the metropolitan world of speed, Marc imagines, he will be able to write a "song of speed, of energy" that will address the downside of modernity as well as people's emotions: In it "would be mixed" the positive and negative dimensions of modern life; it would address both the thrilling "dance of money" and the "voluptuous dances in Broadway," as well as the brutal aspects of city life, for instance "the noise of a policeman's stick as it strikes the head of a wayward drunk" (*Office* 101). "Marc Kranz" promotes a hybrid form of modern letters that paints a realistic but optimistic picture of urban America. *The Office*, as a disillusioned but optimistic, stylistically mixed novel, presents itself as a prototype of this kind of literature.

Although this and other stories in *The Office* illustrate that individuals affected by Glymmer, Read & Co.'s failure advocate change, they do not naïvely suggest that these individuals can

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Thorstein Veblen similarly criticizes that the "current pecuniary organisation of industry" and the "consequent high repute of the salesmanlike activities and aptitudes [...] sets both the proclivity to efficient work and the penchant for serviceability at cross purposes with the common good" (*Instinct* 355, 350).

simply realize their alternate vision and can promote it in an environment where the overarching discourse of acceleration diametrically opposes such a vision. At the end of "Marc Kranz," the narrative dramatizes that Marc's desire to establish an alternate existence within the modern metropolis seems impossible to him. Marc resolves that he will not be able to establish a position for himself that is both critically removed and involved in the temporal super-structure of modern America when he witnesses the city regain its velocity at dawn: "People appeared on the street. A taxi hurried by. Another motor truck. Another trolley. A line of laborers, spades clicking, came out. [...] More people. More noise. Motor trucks thundering. Sirens shrieking" (*Office* 103). Syntactical sequencing as well as a logic of escalation ('A taxi,' 'Another motor truck. Another trolley') evoke the power of the urban circulatory system, which generates a high-paced dynamic that governs every element within it. Marc finally leaves New York because, just as Jimmy Herf in *Manhattan Transfer*, he cannot see how he will ever be able to lead a 'better life' within the American metropolis.

Despite this pessimistic ending, "Marc Kranz" is visionary and optimistic. The narrative endorses the protagonist for facing the detrimental effects of his 'successfully' synchronized life in a moment of repose, for devising an alternate practice of modern writing and for becoming determined to change his life into a more gratifying form. The visionary nature of these aspects as well as the fact that ten more stories that negotiate the possibility of reconciling the elements of 'the good life' with a participation in the metropolis follow "Marc Kranz," distinguishes Asch's novel from a leftist critique such as *Manhattan Transfer*. The latter not only stops dead with Jimmy's departure from the metropolis but, more importantly, it does not present the prospect of change – a change that emerges within disillusioned, yet optimistic individuals who set out to transform individual and social life in modern America for the better. While Dos Passos' novel takes the fascinating, yet bewildering metropolis as its protagonist, Asch's novel (just as Frank's *City Block*) puts its hope in individuals: It does not simply problematize the destruction of individual agency but it emphasizes the potential of each individual to reclaim agency and to make a change.

Both of these generative dimensions are carried forth in the second anchor story of *The Office*, which focuses on the statistician Henry Clarke. "Henry Clarke" specifies the vision of a grass-roots revolution of modern American life, which the first anchor story introduces, presenting it to the reader in more graspable and more practical terms. To prepare this, the story's opening confronts the reader with a critical assessment of three 'successful' businessmen on the subway:

> When he entered the car, the other three were already there. The paper was spread on their knees, and Donner held the cards in his hand. [...] They looked very foolish, these three:

> Donner, very fat, now that the day was over had unbuttoned his vest and visibly was breathing for the first time; the other two, Cooper and Whittings, typical insurance men, still looked correct, hair well combed, faces shaven, collars unwilted, clean. [...] They might have been going to meet a customer. Only did their permanent appearance look worn out: premature streaks of grey hair, and thin blue circles around the strained eyes. (137)

As it is focalized through Henry, this passage potentially sensitizes the reader to the fact that Henry's outlook differs markedly from Donner, Whittings and Cooper's. It reveals that Henry takes note of their perfect adaptation to the metropolitan temporal regime: They use the commute efficiently to complete the daily task of reading the paper and, if no other task offers itself, they fill the void of stimulation with an entertaining card game. Additionally, Whittings and Cooper continue to parade their professionality as efficient businessmen. They still look 'correct, hair well combed, faces shaven, collars unwilted, clean.' The quoted passage moreover reveals that Henry's outlook on the three men's behavior is critical and diagnostic – it is fairly autonomous from the temporal imperative that dominates Donner, Whittings and Cooper's every action. The description of the three businessmen emphasizes that they try to confine and conceal every aspect of their human nature, try to give an air of control and machine-like efficiency: Their vests confine their breathing, their stiff collars hide their throat and neck and their facial and head hair are closely shaven or combed into a controlled shape. Such a 'successful' adaptation is portrayed as a source of alienation from the self. The normalized behavior and appearance of these 'typical insurance men' indicates, to Henry, that such an existence neither makes them healthy, nor enriches their being with 'depth.' Nothing about them reveals that their lives include any individual, meaningful actions or experiences that would foster in them distinct 'selves.' The signs of exhaustion and untimely aging, which the last sentence of the quoted passage pinpoints, are not physical traces of life-changing *Erfahrungen*. They result from an unhealthy lifestyle that countless American businessmen share, as the word 'typical' indicates.

For the remainder of the opening scene on the subway, the narrative persistently focuses on Henry's positive alterity. The purpose of this sort of insistence appears to be a disillusionment of the reader about synchronized business life as well as his familiarization with the mechanism through which Henry makes modernity livable for himself: Henry emancipates his life from the sway of the acceleration imperative in order to counteract the negative effects of fast living. For instance, the narrative portrays Henry's surprise at the fact that Donner, Whittings and Cooper cannot see that the office failure, which "stopped him for a while" (*Office* 139), might present a welcome opportunity for him to take some time off:

> Couldn't they understand that he cared very little whether his firm had failed or not? That as a matter of fact he liked it? It gave him a feeling of freedom or irresponsibility. [...] He was going to take a vacation now. He had promised that to himself coming up on the subway. For a week he'd stay home, work in the garden, fix up the house, be with his

> children. And then he'd look for another job. [...] He was going to rest and enjoy himself. [...] After all he was a human being, besides being a statistician. (*Office* 140–41)

This passage portrays Henry's desire to escape the temporal imperative of business life for a period of time as valid and understandable, thereby implicitly reinforcing Marc Kranz' vision.[252] With Henry as the focalizer, the quoted passage spells out for the reader the great prospects that momentary deceleration holds for the modern individual: Henry is convinced that a break from the straining work on Wall Street will enable him to recuperate and to prepare him for his return to the metropolis. In this passage, a 'successful' synchronization is implicitly identified as the source of people's alienation from their own actions as well as from the space and the people that surround them.[253] Meanwhile, a mending quality is attributed to a meaningful and prolonged engagement with the physical world and with other people: Henry will counteract his alienation once he cultivates the soil on which he and his family live and once he spends quality time with his significant others, enriching his life with *Erfahrungen* and fostering deep relations with them.

A long passage on the next page illustrates that the prerequisite for this potentially mending process is Henry's comparative independence from the acceleration imperative as well as his immunity to acts of regulation:

> 'Mr. Donner,' said Henry, 'I thought I'll go down tomorrow to see your flower beds. I promised to fix them two months ago.'
>
> Donner looked at him and couldn't believe it. 'Aren't you going to the city tomorrow?' he asked.
>
> 'No,' said Henry, 'I thought I'd take a rest.'
>
> Donner was shocked. A man without occupation. A man doing nothing. [...]
>
> The [card] game did not go on. They were too uncomfortable. Silently they all stopped playing, and Donner placed his cards in his pocket. They took out the evening papers and were careful not to read about the failure, so as not to hurt Henry's feelings, while he sat on the seat looking into space and in undertone whistling a popular song. It was a wonderful life! No responsibilities. No worries. A wife and two kids. A cottage all his own. Enough for three months in the bank. Hurrah!
>
> 'Henry,' said Donner, almost blushing, 'come down to my office tomorrow. We'll talk over the possibility of having you over at the bank. [...]'
>
> 'Thanks, Mr. Donner,' Henry said. 'I appreciate it. But I feel kind of tired. Would it make a difference if I came down next week?'

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[252] Asch's unpublished story "The Pastime" similarly portrays a white-collar worker who yearns to "quote no prices, display no line, issue no catalogue, make no sale, announce no clearance, discontinue no number, meet no competition" for some time. Just as Henry, he prefers to spend time at his home, where "firs above him waved in the wind" and the "blue-green lawn surrounding him looked smooth" (7, 9, 9).

[253] Rosa lists the alienation from space as another result of a high-paced life and as an obstacle to a 'good life.' He argues that "acceleration creates greater mobility and disengagement from physical space" because to "become 'acquainted' with a certain territory or space, to feel 'at home' there" necessitates "forms of grown intimacy" that "take time to develop" (*Alienation* 85, 84, 84, 84). Anderson describes the alienation from space in *Perhaps Women* as well: Modern man "has no definite connection with the things with which he is surrounded, no relations with the clothes he wears, the house he lives in. [...] he goes too easily from place to place. Places begin to mean less and less to him" (42).

> 'No,' grumbled Donner, 'suit yourself.' But his eyes looked as if he were swearing at this moment. (*Office* 142–43)

Henry's determination to take a break evidently puts him in disfavor with his peers prompts them to perform acts of regulation, which such a behavior commonly elicited at the time. Especially Donner does not conceal his disapproval. With a leading question, he seeks to prompt Henry to adopt a more acceptable behavior: 'Aren't you going to the city tomorrow'? All three business men moreover reproach Henry's behavior through body language and intonation. They suddenly terminate their card game and refrain from interacting with him. This scene lays bare the regulatory micro-power which confronts Henry, the taboo-breaking individual, in a society of speed-pioneers. More specifically, it suggests that American business men have internalized the norms of acceleration to a degree that makes them unable to ever cast off the speed-imperative – be it during their working hours in the metropolis or during their leisure time in the suburb. The fact that Henry will fix Donner's flower beds suggests that he is the only one who ever emancipates himself from the regime of speed.

Henry's deliberation to act independently from this very regime is put in a favorable light. The cited passage presents him as superior: While Donner, Whittings and Cooper remain permanently caught up in their compulsion to regulate Henry and keep their minds busy at all times, Henry looks 'into space,' rejoicing in the prospect of dedicating some time to his home and family. Through Henry's perspective, the reader is acquainted with a strategy that can make modern life more livable. While Henry thinks about his wife, who is portrayed as just as positively divergent because she would "be glad he was going to stay home for a while" (*Office* 143), he even begins to smile. The inclusion of such a divergent act – and the reaction to it – in the narrative marks another specific instance that is designed to disillusion the reader and to sensitize her to the notion that the imperative of acceleration inhibits people's health and happiness: "the papers had fallen on his three neighbors' laps, and they were staring at him. [...] So for the good of the community he effaced the grin, and set his jaws. That's how a bankrupt should look. Fight. Fight" (*Office* 144). This fictional rendering of discursive micro-power is a critique, even if, in this instance, it primarily celebrates the disenchanted visionary Henry, who frowns only to sooth his starry-eyed peers, yet remains contently self-assured on the inside.

In the opening scene of "Henry Clarke," the reader is evidently confronted with the suggestion that individuals should emancipate their lives from the imperative of acceleration at times and should allow themselves to engage in slower forms of living and working to reconcile the elements of 'the good life' (deep social relations, a sense of identity, a feeling of security) with their fast-paced work life in the metropolis. In the story's second part, the narrative negotiates the function that the suburban realm, which Henry and the three businessmen inhabit, could potentially take on for such a generative combination of fast and slow. As in the story "Murder" in *City Block*, tropes of sentimental fiction are rehabilitated here to revalidate an attitude that does not suppress the social and emotional dimensions which make modern Americans happy and healthy (at least in both novels' logic). The portrayal of acceleration's antithesis – Henry's life in Jersey – appears almost overdone. The narrative suddenly metamorphoses into a vibrant portrayal of (physical) intimacy, harmony and affection. When Henry steps off the train, he joyfully greets his wife with their personal welcome: "Hello, woman," Henry shouts from afar and his wife Violet, enthusiastically, replies "Hello, man." Henry's daughter Ruth comes running toward him and flings her arms around his neck (*Office* 145, cf. 156). As the family drives home, Henry is "occupied with Ruth and with Violet's hand that held his shoulder. The hand was warm and encouraging" (*Office* 146). This sentimental quality that marks these descriptions prevails in the portrayal of the moment in which Violet learns about her husband's wish to stay home for a week. Instead of being shocked at such a divergent act, a joyful "tear [runs down] from her eye [and] moistened his cheek" while they embrace (*Office* 147). Such a portrayal calls up nineteenth-century portrayals of distress and tenderness, which modernists in the literary field and beyond considered dramatically outdated. The sudden transformation of the narrative in "Henry Clarke" replicates the attention-grabbing break that occurs at the transition from the first to the second section of *The Office*. Although it is much less radical in stylistic terms, the sudden clustering of sentimental tropes, an emotional tone and a harmonious mood in the narrative potentially raises readers' attention to the fact that Henry's suburban life indeed measures up to the compensatory potential he imagined it to have.

Especially the essentialist stylization of Henry's four-year-old daughter Ruth contrasts with a statement that describes Marc Kranz' rational business attitude in the first anchor story: "Sentiment. Why should he [Marc] care whether Volpe's wife ate? Or even Volpe's children" (*Office* 95)? Such an attitude comes under attack not only in "Marc Kranz." In "Henry Clarke," the mode of internal focalization invites the reader to sympathize with Henry's emotional attachment to his daughter, too: Ruth is stylized as a pious child, as a "plump, blue-eyed bundle set off by a fuzzy halo of gold" hair, whose "great blue eyes open wide, aware of the new wonders on this earth" (*Office* 144, 148). These carefully worded descriptions reveal that Asch's novel is designed, just as sentimental modernist prose of the day, to re-validate "bonds of emotional identity" (Clark 13). Throughout *The Office*, such deep relations are presented as a positive antipode to social alienation, which affects 'successfully' synchronized individuals who are featured in almost every story. The second anchor story "Marc Kranz" presents the prospect that modern individuals could overcome this condition if only they, at times, "forgot everything" about the imperatives that dominate their lives in the metropolis, emancipated themselves from them and occupied themselves with alternate, slower activities: While weeding the tomatoes in his garden, Henry "saw only the little brittle plants that grew in the way" and rejoices in the way his children join in the yard work (*Office* 148).[254] At a point in time when acceleration and efficiency had become firmly integrated into the common conception of 'success' and Americanness, *The Office* aimed to encourage readers to follow Henry's example: to emancipate themselves from the acceleration imperative at times and engage intensely with their own selves, their environment and their significant others in order to make their modern lives more livable.

"Henry Clarke" makes a case for a socially and environmentally connected existence once again at the end. While sitting at the dinner table with his family, Henry thinks about what real happiness means for him: "He couldn't see how he earned all this. So much happiness. So much peace. So little desire. Just life" (*Office* 149). The reference to wage labor in the verb 'to earn' is remarkable since it suggests that no kind of work in the metropolis can ever 'earn' Henry the happiness which the affection, intimacy and stability of family life gives him. Notably, the possibility that this ideal of a 'good life' is in any way backward-looking or anti-modernist is refuted on the following page, where Henry reflects "'I'm getting old,'" but in the next instance, adds "No, I'm growing up. I'm becoming a man" (*Office* 150) – a man living in the modern world, the narrative suggests, who has reached maturity because he not only knows how to succeed as a statistician in the metropolis but has found a way to counteract forms of alienation as well.

At the story's close, Henry and Violet sit "on the porch, and, arm around each other, gazed at the stars, and at the dull shine that, miles, miles away, reflected the light of the city" (*Office* 150). As this sentence once again illustrates, "Henry Clarke" presents the prospect that modern individuals turn their suburban home into a "heterotopia of compensation," which constitutes "something like [a spatially remote] counter-site" or an "effectively enacted utopia," in Michel Foucault's words ("Of Other Spaces" 24). Since Donner, Whittings and Cooper are introduced as individuals who live in the suburb, yet do not ever separate their after-work lives from the metropolitan (time-)space, which ever looms in the background ('dull shine'), it becomes evident that modern individuals need to actively transform relatively remote spaces such as the suburb into counter-sites of a heterotopian kind. Historically, this inscribed plea could be read as a reaction to the contemporary trend of annexing suburban municipalities to the nation's urban centers – an act that shifted the city limits outward and transferred the civic, commercial and temporal organization of the metropolis more or less gradually onto areas, which had "clustered near the boundaries of the nation's major central cities" since the early nineteenth century, when high-speed transport facilitated commuting (Teaford 12; cf. Jackson 26).[255] As Ivan D. Steen puts it, "many people became urban dwellers without ever moving to the city" (68).[256] Asch's novel similarly addresses the problem that the suburb does not represent a place in which modern businessmen automatically distance themselves from the metropolitan world – and from the speed-imperative. As a result, it seems, *The Office* emphasizes that modern Americans need to re-claim these relatively remote locales as the deceleratory, quasi-rural places, as which they were envisioned before the first wave of acceleration transformed American life: Seventy-five years before Brooklyn was annexed as a borough of New York City in 1898, lots in Brooklyn Heights had still been advertised as "the nearest country retreat" that offered upper-middle-class buyers "all the advantages of the country with most of the conveniences of the city" (qtd. in Teaford 3; cf. Jackson 29). In 1925, this early-nineteenth-century conception of a good, modern life is revived in *The Office*, aligning it with "a number of idealistic[, often religiously-motivated] suburban pioneers [who had] sought to fashion an alternative environment [in the 1870s] where those forced to work in the city could maintain a home life attuned to the tranquility, beauty and purity of nature" (Teaford 6).[257] "Henry Clarke" presents the possibility that white-collar workers of the nineteen twenties preserve suburbs as slow places of sociability, history and identity. The narrative however emphasizes that this depends on their active dismissal of the speed-imperative and their rejection to submit to the regulatory pressures they meet. In this manner, the narrative seems constantly engaged in trying to induce a similar behavior in the reader.

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[254] The descriptions of this activity bears a striking resemblance to the description offered by Ethel Longworth Smith in her "Defense of Suburbia" from 1928: "I rake the leaves myself from our seventy-five by one hundred and twenty-five foot garden. My small son builds a hut from packing-boxes in the sumach bushes of the vacant lot next door; my daughter wrestles with a cigar-box which will presently appear as a bird-house meant to lure a bluebird to our garden" (544). Longworth Smith responded to an article by Christine Frederick, the prolific advocate of household engineering, who had condemned the allegedly anti-individualistic standardization of life in the suburb alongside small-town class-divisions, values and morals and had promoted life in an apartment-house as a "much more frank standardization of life, and a far more efficient one" (290).

Just as Anderson's *Windy McPherson's Son*, Asch's novel makes a case for the hero's return to a slower, pre-industrial setting. The 'prophet' Henry, however, only opts for a momentary form of distancing. After his time-out, he will resume his work as an alternate but successful statistician, yet he will retreat to his "heterochron[y]" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 26) each night to maintain a critical distance and to counteract the detrimental effects of his 'successfully' synchronized work life. In contrast to conservative idealizations of the (quasi-)rural home, which advertisements for suburban home ownership, publications such as *Suburban Life,*[258] religious leaders as well as the Southern Agrarians promoted at the time (cf. Ransom et al. xxx; Jackson 31), the American project of acceleration as such never comes under attack in *The Office*. Asch's novel merely criticizes that the speed imperative dominates people's lives even while they reside in relatively remote residential areas. It is not the escapist return to a slower (quasi-)rural sphere that is promoted in *The Office* but a productive movement back and forth between old/slow and new/fast spheres. Albeit in much less radical terms, Asch's novel anticipates the critique presented by such radical leftist writers such as Dos Passos, Richard Wright or Michael Gold in the 1930s. Unlike Depression-era responses, however, *The Office* is dedicated to the cause of managing and optimizing rather than subverting. With Henry, it introduces an alternate hero of the modern age; a prophet who manages to control and steer different manifestations of speed rather than be controlled by it at all times.

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[255] Among the most important innovations count the steam ferry in the 1810s, the electric streetcar and -railroad in the 1890s and the automobile in about 1910.

[256] Early-twentieth-century commentators observed that suburban areas were "quick to imitate the cities" (Aronovici 169) and thus became spheres where some "revolutionary and colonial relics" and "elm-shaded streets preserve[d] a little of pristine tranquility," yet "trolley car stations and clanging trolleys, telephone pay stations, newsboys hawking late editions of the metropolitan 'yellows' [...] assure the traveler that he has not left the city" (Coburn 81).

[257] The earliest pioneer of this "romantic suburban planning" was Llewellyn Haskell, "member of a religious cult that believed perfection on earth was possible through correct living" in an appropriate environment, as the one he created in Llewellyn Park in Orange, New Jersey. A similar suburban area, called Lake Forest, was created by Chicago-area Presbyterians. Frederick Law Olmsted, who later became a spokesperson of the City Practical movement (see chapter II.B.1), designed the Chicago suburb Riverside as an area characterized by "curving streets, large lots, trees, shrubs, and an air of rusticity" (Teaford 7).

SIGNS OF CHANGE AND RELAPSE IN THE METROPOLIS: "ROBERT MICHELET" AND "MR. READ"

Even though Marc and Henry's reactions to Glymmer, Read & Co.'s failure are the most visionary ones that the reader encounters in *The Office*, a confidence in the prospect of change runs through the novel. In all fourteen stories of section two, the bankruptcy is portrayed as a shock that has the potential to animate individuals to think critically about their hyper-accelerated lives – and even to transform them into a more gratifying form. "Robert Michelet" (story 5) and "Harry Widener" (story 10) introduce two such individuals, yet both stories address the problem that their protagonists might revert to their accustomed behavioral patterns shortly after the failure. Since these critical portrayals of relapse interact meaningfully with the visionary anchor stories that precede them, however, they function as cautionary tales, rather than pessimistic ones. They support the appeal for a revolution of modern American life.

The story "Robert Michelet," which directly follows the first anchor story, differs from "Marc Kranz" in meaningful ways, yet it ultimately reinforces the novel's disillusioned but optimistic vision. As in "One of the Clerks" and "Marc Kranz," the office failure not only sensitizes the protagonist of this story to the "futility" of business life but it nurtures in him a desire to escape this very life as well. Robert Michelet is suddenly aware that his life as a white-collar worker leaves him "cooped up among four walls, talking continually over the telephone, seeing the world through a telephone wire" (*Office* 107, 106). This suggestive description picks up on the downsides of office work which other stories in *The Office* illustrate. Implicitly referring back to the portrayal in "The Voice," for instance, it appears designed for the purpose of disillusioning the reader about the impact that technologically transmitted and accelerated communication actually has on the office worker: it alienates him from his surroundings, restricts his room to move both spatially and mentally and confronts him with the submerging, inexorable *Takt* of technically mediated, socially uprooting communication.[259] After the failure, the protagonist acts as a self-thinking individual who roams freely and does not panic at the prospect of pausing on the slipping slope of change. Just as Henry Clarke, he feels that the failure "freed him. Momentarily, to be sure. For a while he need not think of business, of stocks, of profits and losses" (*City* 108). As these sentences indicate, the failure leaves Henry's and Robert's bodies and minds liberated from the *Takt* of Wall Street trading and it animates them to transform their lives into one they consider more gratifying.

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[258] For examples, see the documents collected in chapter six of Becky M. Nicolaides and Andrew Wiese's *Suburb Reader*.

Just as Henry, Robert is authorized as an alternate hero in a narrative which dramatizes that a withdrawal from the collective race will be met with reproach in the business world. The latter is, in this case, embodied by Robert's father, a 'successful,' self-made American pioneer. Descriptions of the father's attitude draw attention to the internal and external restraint as well as the short-sightedness that characterize the American pioneer in the domain of American business (in Waldo Frank's critical texts as well): He "could see no other way of living than struggle" since he has "devoted his whole existence toward amassing money" (*Office* 107). The 'successfully' normalized businessman is discredited as a failure since he acts compulsively and self-delusively and lets himself be dominated by the imperative of acceleration. Such an individual categorically disapproves of Robert's intention to slow down his life's pace: He warns Robert, quite alarmingly, about the consequences of such a divergent behavior: "A fellow's got to be kept busy or he'll get into trouble" (*Office* 110).

Tying in with the anchor story "Henry Clarke," "Robert Michelet" problematizes the 'trouble' that invariably affects individuals if they deviate from the norm of acceleration and strive to attain a better life. Moreover, it complements the anchor story since it illustrates how Robert may become as resilient against regulatory micro power as Henry in the first place. Another divergent character, Robert's future step mother Edith, is presented as a kind of mentor who guides Robert toward such an independent state. Edith is stylized as an alternate influence in Robert's life that runs counter to the imperative of acceleration: "She had always been against his

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[259] This critique is reiterated in the description of a telephone operator's work later in the novel: "All day long she [Miss James] sat in her cubicle before the switchboard, connecting, disconnecting, ringing, calling" but "she was doubly blind: she never saw and never was seen. All things to her were voices and to all she too was a voice" (*Office* 245). The constant act of 'connecting' and communicating (with) others beyond the office leaves Miss James unconnected to the person on the other end of the line on a personal level. She and her interlocutors remain mere voices that disappear as quickly as they have appeared on the other end of the line. The diagnosis that technically accelerated modes of communication engender a social climate of alienation and anonymity was voiced by Waldo Frank in 1927 as well: "Newspapers, telephones, radios, are imperious short cuts, demanding that we devote an ever-increasing portion of our days to details and surfaces of men and matters we might well ignore" ("Drug" 53, emphasis added). Veblen similarly critiqued the effect of stress, which the passage from "Harry Widener" addresses as well: the telephone's "ubiquitous presence conduces to an unremitting nervous tension and unrest" (*Instinct* 316).

[Robert's] going into business. [...] It was possibly even she who had made him think first of other things than business. Of traveling. Of seeing things. Of living" (*Office* 106). This description identifies Edith as a divergent individual who recognizes that there are other things in the life of a human being – *Erfahrung*, self-determination, enjoyment – that make it worth living. She challenges others to think realistically and productively about their lives: "'Are you glad?' she asked him," implying that Robert should consider other routes to happiness than racing for recognition in the world of modern business (*Office* 108). In this sense, Edith is a secular version of Lotte Rabinovich, who is portrayed as a spiritual guide for her son and his doctor in *City Block* (see chapter III.A.2). As in Frank's novel, the figure of the guide is stylized as an embodiment of the alternate ideal: Edith's non-verbal mode of engagement invites intimacy and affection ("She always smiled; with an intriguing smile, a smile that seemed to invite" (*Office* 106)) and her conversational practice contrasts with the alienating modes of (tele-)communication that Robert has encountered at Glymmer, Read & Co.: Edith listens attentively to Robert as he tells her of his worries and she answers slowly with deliberation and compassion instead of using impersonal set phrases, as Mrs. Luve does in the first story of *City Block*.

The paragraphs in which Edith is characterized in this manner, however, also include passages that establish a contrast between Edith and Robert, drawing attention to the latter's difficulties of accustoming himself to a slower and deeper, hence less stimulating, mode of interaction. Passages that illustrate Robert's honest attempt to communicate his feelings to Edith are constantly interrupted by passages that relate how his mind compulsively returns to Edith's body, as if it were actively searching for stimulation: First, he notices that "[t]he robe was loose, and it fell on her with folds that clearly outlined her body that rose and fell as she breathed." On the next page, he again sees that "Her robe was open at the neck. The neck was white; it looked soft, and the upper parts of her breasts could be seen. And he wanted to touch them." Yet another page later, "he noticed Edith's breasts again, white soft, touchy" (*Office* 108–10). In this constant alternation between Robert's attempts to verbalize his feelings and passages of projected lust, the novel's critical diagnostic mode comes into relief. It evokes the obsessive way in which an individual who has internalized the imperative to keep constantly on the go searches for stimulation and diversion at times of repose. It invites the reader to track Robert's compulsive search for stimuli. Moreover, it reveals to him that Robert has not yet been able to thrash his craving for immediate gratification. It overcomes him time and again during the comparatively decelerated conversation with Edith.[260] The fact that Robert sexualizes his future stepmother to satisfy his craving moreover indicates that Robert's attitude is problematic. This is especially the case since a passage occurs at the beginning of the story that makes it plain to the reader that Edith's intend to sexually attract him is only a projection by Robert: her smile "seemed to say: 'If you want me to be yours, you had better begin.' But he knew that the smile meant nothing" (*Office* 105). The mere presence of Edith's body produces sexual fantasies in Robert's mind, momentarily satisfying his craving for excitement and thrill. As in "John the Baptist" in Frank's novel, the protagonist is portrayed as his own worst enemy in the struggle to escape a world of speed, whose basic imperatives he has completely internalized. The following statement by Edith even verbalizes this diagnosis: "I think you like me more for my body than you do for myself" (*Office* 111), she remarks, implying that Robert is more interested in the surface thrill of her body than in building a permanent, deep relation with her.

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[260] A similar mechanism is employed in the story "Miss James" to illustrate that the revolutionary impulse, which flares up time and again in the switchboard operator, is thwarted because she has internalized the imperative of efficiency and speed to a degree which makes her unable to act otherwise. Each passage that reveals her incipient revolt is followed by a passage which shows her instinctive return to compliance: "Read asked for a wire, and she wanted not to give it to

Edith's allegation – and Robert's reaction to it – constitute the dramatic turning point in "Robert Michelet." "[W]hen he realized what she had said, he cried 'God!' And ran out of the room" (*Office* 111). Instead of accepting the possible vexation and persistent efforts, which a transformation of his life requires, Robert simply blames Edith for making him "forget what he came for" and unthinkingly discards all of his ambitions. "He jumped into the roadster, and in a flash started off and began to speed over the streets" (*Office* 112). This depiction of Robert's over-dramatic, unjustified and self-deluding reaction seems specially constructed to reiterate and confirm the critical diagnosis that the preceding portrayal has already conveyed. It suggests to the reader that Edith's attempt to guide Robert only fails because he does not completely thrash his habits and does not direct his growing critical awareness at himself. He still wavers between his accustomed ways, which promise instant, easy gratification, and his desire to attain a better life – a task that takes more (time-)intensive measures than he is willing to take on. When confronted with the inconvenient truth and with a challenge that requires time and dedication, he caves in and chooses to return to the world of speed, thrill and instant gratification he originally set out to leave behind.[261]

The remainder of the narrative confronts the reader with an overblown tale of relapse, which substantiates this critique as well as the appeal for change. It details how Robert satisfies his urge to experience as much as possible in only one night out in the city. Before long, Robert encounters an actress called Peaches, who "looks like a Mack Sennet bathing beauty," and he spends the rest of the night drinking, flirting and dancing with her (*Office* 114, cf. 116). Robert

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him. She wanted for once to assert her independence [...]. But after all she did give him the connection, herself saying, 'No, I won't give it to him," and her fingers connecting him [...]. She stayed right where she was. She kept on operating the switchboard" (*Office* 249–50).

[261] Here, the portrayal resonates with a comment Anderson includes in *Perhaps Women* six years later: "to attain real power, of the mind, of the spirit, is a long slow process." So "[w]hy should a man go through all this trouble when he can so easily attain this vicarious power[, for instance, of driving a fast car]" (139)?

and Peaches finally end up in a private room. At the end, a sarcastic twist is inserted into the narrative, which once again draws the reader's attention to Robert's desperate, pitiful condition: Robert "began to feel sleepy and tired, and went to the sofa on which he had previously been with her and [...] his last thoughts before he lost consciousness were: 'God! an actress! a real one! and mine'" (*Office* 119). These closing lines demonstrate that Robert continues to deceive himself: He believes Peaches to be 'real,' thinks he is in control and that he has established an enduring, committed relationship with her ('mine').

"Robert Michelet" starts out optimistically but it metamorphoses into a cautionary tale of relapse. In the end, Robert is right where he started: His existence is dominated by the speed of metropolitan life and by thrilling, albeit fleeting, social relations. This stylization of Robert as an individual who yearns to escape from such an existence yet shies away from the challenges this entails carries a distinct moralistic undertone. Robert's decision to discard his ambition and to embrace the quick returns that alcohol, noncommittal dating/intercourse and the American entertainment culture provide appears in a negative light in this tale of relapse. "Robert Michelet" illustrates that Robert remains ever alienated from his own actions: Since he is used to live his life at a high speed and is affected by discursive micro-power, he "rarely do[es] what the [sic!] 'really' want[s] to do'" (Rosa, *Alienation* 91). The dramatic composition of the story appears designed to substantiate the reader's critical outlook as well as to enlist his support for the alternate ideal he encounters in "Marc Kranz." The story starts out as a tale that gives the reader reason to hope for a change in Robert's approach to life as well, yet this hope is deceived when the protagonist suddenly discards his good intentions. The second part of the story most likely prompts the reader to develop a dislike against this act as well as to substantiate his critical awareness about the impact of fast living: shattering any hope for a change in the protagonist, it confronts the reader with a vivid account of relapse, which calls up many of the downsides of fast living that previous stories address as well. Evidently, even this story seems carefully constructed to enhance *The Office*'s generative effect: It aims to create a critical awareness, it explores possibilities for change as well as viable alternatives and it invites the reader to embrace alternate values and lifestyles.

"Harry Widener" substantiates this appeal for change and individual action. Building a stark contrast to the portrayal of Robert's inability to focus his mind, this narrative confronts the reader with the productive, decelerating process of critical reflection and introspection, in which the junior partner of Glymmer, Read & Co. engages as he walks home after the failure. Throughout the story, the reader is invited to follow Harry Widener as his thoughts proceed from frustration and a vague awareness of his desires towards a viable alternate conception of modern life. Once again, the hero of this story is an individual who takes the office failure as an occasion to renegotiate the life he leads, to liberate his existence from the regime of acceleration and to imagine possible ways of transforming his life.

Initially, the narrative draws attention to the fact that the failure makes Harry, son of a wealthy businessman, admit to himself that neither his job nor his leisure activities have any real significance for his life and identity.[262] Unlike those Americans who were intoxicated by modernity's promise of speed and progress, Harry "never really became interested in the business. Never felt the thrill" of working on Wall Street. When attending urban entertainments such as prize fights in his spare time, he feels equally "no fun in it. No thrill. There was no interest in it. He never became excited, never wanted anybody really to win, never felt anything at stake" (*Office* 203). These corresponding descriptions of modern trade and popular entertainment are significant because they indicate that neither of these celebrated activities deeply affect Harry – they do not constitute *Erfahrungen* upon which he can base a sense of self.[263]

In Asch's novel, however, this critical diagnosis is complemented with an action-oriented negotiation of possible coping strategies. Already on the first page of "Harry Widener," the reader encounters the prospect of change in the sentence "Something had happened [when the office failed that] he [Harry] could not understand" but "was curious to find out" (*Office* 200). Although it is not exactly clear that this 'something' refers to a change in Harry himself at this point, the remainder of the story dramatizes Harry's newly-gained critical agency, which drives his search for a way of changing his life for the better. The whole narrative represents an extensive moment of reflection, during which Harry "saw nothing around him" and was "oblivious of everything but his thoughts" (*Office* 112–13). On the first pages, the narrative time and again accentuates that this moment of deceleration helps Harry to recognize that life and work in modern America give him no sense of agency or meaningful action and it stimulates him to determine what he requires to make his life more gratifying: "He was terribly bored by the idea of what would happen, since he knew it exactly before. What he really wanted to do was to run somewhere or do something or hit somebody. He wanted to do something exciting" (*Office* 201). This passage suggests to the reader that Harry wishes to find that his actions and experiences are more than momentary and inconsequential: he wishes that they impact his life, that they constitute meaningful *Erfahrungen* which give him a sense of personal history and identity. This is especially the case since they contrast with the meaningless, momentarily titillating *Erlebnisse* that Harry wants to leave behind: "go[ing] to the club, chat[ting] a little, gossip[ping] a little, mak[ing] love to some woman friend" (*Office* 204). The productivity of slowing down and taking time for reflection whenever time scarcity "counteracts our capacity to relate episodes of experience to a sense of identity" is thus promoted by "Harry Widener" (Rosa, "Social" 18).

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[262] In this sense "Harry Widener" provides the counter-tale to "One of the Clerks," which describes the problems that the volatile business world has on a less well-off clerk. Since the stories assess the office failure from seemingly opposite directions, they expand the novel's critical diagnosis and strengthen its critical impact.

[263] The narrative here draws attention to a phenomenon which Rosa, too, addresses as the subjective feeling that the transformations which occur constantly and ubiquitously no longer fundamentally change anything because they only affect surfaces while deeper structures (for instance the ways in which Wall Street offices operate) remain unaltered ("Beschleunigung" 1051, 1053). In his essay on *Alienation,* Rosa relates the feeling that none of an individual's actions or experiences (i.e., *Erlebnisse*) ever fundamentally change anything to a "sense of a deep self-alienation" in individuals since "our sense of self arises from our actions, experiences and relationships" in the first place (97).

As the narrative continues, tracing Harry's thoughts while he walks, it illustrates that the protagonist develops an alternate vision of life through which he will be able to regain a sense of self. First, it underscores that Harry knows instinctively that he needs to regain a sense of purpose in the world and needs to enrich his existence with an emotional dimension: "he wanted to risk things, wanted to worry, wanted to be unsure of everything, feel that at any moment the world would dissolve under his feet and swallow him;" "He wanted things to go wrong, wanted to find himself in these things, wanted to measure himself by personal standards, wanted to feel ownership over himself" (*Office* 208). These sentences present the likelihood that the shock of Glymmer, Read & Co.'s failure sensitizes some of the affected individuals to their innermost desires. Through reflection, Harry realizes that he can only derive real excitement and thrill from actions and experiences that significantly affect his life, engage him emotionally and thus foster in him a sense of self. The second quoted sentence moreover emphasizes that Harry, just as the nameless clerk, considers self-determination as essential to a good life. It reveals that Harry resolves to fight the effects of his assimilated life in the impersonal world of modern business by embracing actions and experiences that impact him as an individual human being.

The extended process of contemplation through which Harry develops an alternate conception of modern living is the dramatic focus of "Harry Widener." The reader is confronted with a narrative that heeds the slow and gradual, yet productive nature of such an act – a narrative that places extra emphasis on the generative potential of deceleration and processuality inherent in purposeful retrospection: "he got an idea. Why not go away, [...] [g]o away and be by himself. Leave his friends and his near ones. Be alone and dependent only upon himself and upon nobody else. [...] Then he would have peace of mind; then he would be happy" (*Office* 207). This passage indicates that Harry's impulse is to simply leave the city in order to escape the forces which dominate his life in the metropolis (social norms and expectations). A passage that occurs a little later in the narrative, however, demonstrates that Harry, as though by habit, soon substitutes his first impulse to escape with a nostalgic vision of control and purpose:

> [B]egin[ning] as a brakeman or a fireman, [he] would ride the engine, would go across the country. [...] [H]e'd tear across the country on the back of an engine, dirty and sooty, would oil her, would take care of her. He would be happy. [...] Blackness all around him, he would stand on the back of a locomotive as it rushed and shrieked through the night, with its great eye searching the darkness. From time to time he would open its sizzling jaw and feed it.

> Blackness would be all around him. Before him nothing, just blackness. Speed and strength through blackness. (209–10)

Harry's vision of working as a skilled machinist presents itself as a nostalgic projection of the bygone "gear-and-girder era," in which American speed-pioneering still seemed compatible with a sense of human agency because it was more tangible, visually and tactilely, for the individual than tele-communicated market speculation (Tichi xii; cf. Nye 77). As a machinist operating a steam locomotive, Harry imagines, his actions would have a direct impact: They determine whether the train decelerates (when he brakes) or gains velocity (when he feeds the fire). The phrase 'ride the engine' as well as the imagery of conquering unknown ('black') territory indicates that Harry's vision moreover draws on traditional American narratives of pioneering and (territorial) conquest, fusing them with a familiar American tale of machine modernity. Harry's vision momentarily lapses into a form that would reinforce the imperative of acceleration, which he set out to challenge.

A final episode, however, reveals that Harry eventually develops a truly alternate vision of modern life through the process of contemplation. As Harry's thoughts turn to Gertrude Donovan and as he recollects his feeling that "from the beginning a certain sympathy, a certain understanding" (*Office* 211) existed between them, he realizes that life as an independent railroad pioneer, who only ever engages with an inanimate machine (oiling it, etc.), cannot provide him with a sense of self because it lacks a social and emotional dimension. Since Harry takes the time to recognize this, the portrayal suggests, he is able to optimize his vision: Once again, "he got an idea. Why not take her with him? [...] Then he would have responsibility. Then he would have risk. Then he would have a real problem" (*Office* 213). As these sentences suggest, individuals require deep social relations in order to feel that their actions matter. Substantiating this suggestion, the succeeding paragraphs chronicle how Harry's vision evolves accordingly as he reconsiders the people he passes in the after-work crowd:

> These were people alone, all alone, who had nobody to go to; life had no surprises for them, no complications. [...] That was why he needed Gertrude Donovan. He did not want to be all alone. He wanted somebody with him, somebody who would share things with him, share the joys and the sorrows; [...] really be part of him. [...]
>
> Life was no more to him a succession of dinners and luncheons, of light love-making, of luke-warm prizefights. No, it was a warm thing, a thing of troubles, of joys, real joys, earned joys, of sorrows, earned sorrows, a life consisting of work and of love, real work and real love. (*Office* 213–14)

These paragraphs underpin the alternate vision which the reader encounters previously in "Marc Kranz" and "Henry Clarke:" An alternate existence filled with meaningful actions, experiences and deep relations enables modern individuals to gain a sense of purpose and a sense of self.

Social unities ('part of him') which are based on long-term and deep-reaching processes of interaction, are essential to a truly gratifying life.

Historically, "Harry Widener"'s critical intervention corresponds to assessments published by sociologists on the transformation of individual and social life in the age of acceleration. In 1925, Burgess for instance noted that "the center of [people's] interest has gravitated from the home and the neighborhood to the outside world," where "the effect of participation goes little beyond the stimulation of individual emotion and has little or no function for social integration" ("Preface" xvi). Just as Burgess's writings, Asch's stories in *City Block* aim to draw the American (reading) public's attention to the deleterious effects of hyper-accelerated lifestyles. As the close readings reveal, however, the stories in *City Block* are specially designed to not only disillusion but to activate the reader, too: "Harry Widener," for instance, is constructed as a record of mental refinement that invites the reader to trace this process and, potentially, animates her to (re-)introduce slower forms of thinking, interacting and experiencing into her life as well. By doing so, "Harry Widener" suggests, she, too, may regain a sense of self, a sense of agency and meaningfulness as well as a prospect of social connectedness.

At the end of "Harry Widener," it is unclear whether the protagonist will transform his plan into action. The story ends upon the following note: "when he found himself in the old familiar surroundings [of his home], [...] he was not sure as to what would happen tomorrow" (217). Despite this open ending, the story presents the prospect of change and, tying in with "Robert Michelet," it makes unmistakably clear that anything but a relapse into ignorance, self-denial and a complete surrender to the dominant time-regime paves the way towards a better life.[264]

AT THE END, ANOTHER NEW BEGINNING

Amidst stories that validate characters who derive a critical awareness from the failure, envision more gratifying lifestyles and, sometimes, even set out to transform their lives, negative examples are positioned. These stories introduce the reader to individuals who have internalized the time-regime of Wall Street to a degree that makes them unable to challenge this very regime after the bankruptcy, let alone emancipate their lives from it. They once again confront the reader with critical diagnoses about the effects of hyper-accelerated living, thus substantiating the novel's ethical critique. Additionally, they shed a critical light on 'successful' characters who forfeit the chance to change. More specifically, these stories challenge common conceptions of 'success' and

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[264] Story number nine in *The Office* reinforces this stance. It focuses on "Some of the Clerks" who worked for the eponymous office and are unable to liberate their existence as "parts of the same machine [i.e., the office]," within which "they had been working, working, on and on, not even thinking about it" and realize their dream of going "outside, somewhere in[to] a park, or in[to] the country" (*Office* 177, 171, 167). Instead, they immediately turn their attention to the next-best diversion (a card game) and finally end up in a brothel, where they, like Harry, delve in a momentary illusion of agency, monetary security and human (physical) intimacy. Although stories such as these induce pessimism rather than hope, they challenge the overarching discourse of acceleration time and again.

'failure,' underpinning the importance of 'intentional failing' for a grass-roots revolution of individual and social life in modern America. Individuals who remain relatively ignorant of the injurious nature of their fast life and waste the opportunity to change it are portrayed as failed individuals in *The Office*.

One of the partners at Glymmer, Read & Co., Mr. Read, is portrayed accordingly. His story concludes *The Office*, confronting the reader with another deterrent tale of ignorance and mindless speed-pioneering that once again emphasizes the urgent need for individual action at the very end. "Mr. Read" covers a half-an-hour period during which the protagonist waits in the hotel lobby for a business meeting about his next Wall Street venture. The fact that the act of waiting, hence "[e]nforced inactivity" (Ehn/Löfgren 35), is the topic of the last story in a novel on the effects of acceleration is significant in itself. The narrative moves the moment of shock and inactivity after the bankruptcy into the limelight to demonstrate that Read fails to use the time given to him in generative ways. After all, it is up to people like him to decide whether the ever-accelerating race on Wall Street will continue.

The opening of "Mr. Read" replicates the sequenced style of "Wall Street," the prose poem that opens the novel in section one. This time, however, a selective omniscience is employed to immediately refute the ideological alignment, which such a style commonly signaled at the time:

> Hotel lobby. Tall, high, great, tremendous hall. Palms. Orchestra playing. Soft lights falling on everything. A circle. Chairs around. Soft, languorous chairs. Chairs so soft that when you sit in them, you feel falling way down somewhere below. Soft, nice chairs. Little tables. Brass ash trays. Soft, yielding carpets.
>
> A woman across from him sitting low in a soft chair. A black satin dress that promised heaven, and below, crossed high, legs. Beautiful legs. A look, soft yet self-respecting. You might try to talk to me, but don't be too sure of your welcome. I might be insulted. (*Office* 255)

A terse sequence of attributes introduces the locale, implying that these are the elements in the room to which Read directs his attention. The series of adjectives in the second phrase, for instance, relates the main features of the hall, where the lobby is situated. Only occasionally, the narrative decelerates slightly and uses longer or multiple sentences to describe an object upon which Read's fast-shifting attention rests for a moment (i.e., the chair in the first paragraph). The second paragraph focuses on the woman who sits opposite the focalizer and, as it presents Read's lustful consideration of her features and his fantasy of addressing her, it calls up a diagnosis presented in several of the preceding stories in *The Office*: Modern subjects accustomed to a high pace of life crave the short-lived thrills that a quick flirt or sexual encounter may deliver. Some pages later, the use of terms from the semantic field of commerce in a description of the relation which Read imagines moreover express the notion that modern courtship resembles a business transaction – and they clash with Henry Widener's alternate conception of value: "he would have to *get* a woman like that. Must be frightfully *expensive*. But will have to *get* one like that" (*Office* 258, emphases added). The content and the elliptical style of these phrases indicate that Read considers women as a commodity which he can discard as quickly as he can obtain them.

Read repeatedly directs his attention back to the woman throughout the thirty-minute story time (see *Office* 255, 256, 258, 263, 264-65). This temporal structure is significant in itself because it not only identifies Read's incessant 'mental movement' as a quasi-pathological condition – as an uncontrollable compulsion to keep up his accustomed pace of life (i.e., fill his life with as many stimuli as possible). It moreover invites the reader to re-live the incessant movement of Read's mind. Just as Robert Michelet, Read is presented as an individual who has internalized the imperative to keep constantly on the go and who, therefore, incessantly searches for ways to keep up his familiar rate of stimulation. While waiting in the lobby, Read has no access to any source of external stimulation (i.e., a movie or the hustle and bustle of streets or offices), so he cannot keep up his pace of life through "*passive immediate sensorial attention*," which is, as William James pointed out in 1905, produced when "very intense, voluminous, or sudden" sense-impressions affect the individual, for instance in a movie theater, an office or on a street (416). Due to this perceivable lack, Read actively directs his attention to potentially thrilling things around him. After one page of stream-of consciousness narration, a figural narrative situation, in which Read functions as the reflector, is employed, illustrating that Read does not use the "non-event[]" of waiting to, "for a while[,] withdraw from the hectic pace and demands of social life" (Ehn and Löfgren 207, 208). Upon being faced with inertia, Read instead feels the compulsion to keep busy. At no point in the story does he even consider the possibility that a moment of rest and silence could be beneficial. His habituation to high velocities apparently hinders him from doing so. In their ethnological study of inactivity in hyper-accelerated societies, Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren write in 2010 that "[m]en and women resort to all kinds of mundane activities while waiting, as if to deny that they are waiting or to try to forget the fact" (13). Almost a century earlier, *The Office* presents a similar diagnosis: Read engages himself while waiting in order to avoid the feeling that he is falling behind on the slipping slope of change in American business. Due to its socio-critical penchant, however, Asch's novel paints a more negative picture of such a state than Ehn and Löfgren's study: Read is not presented as a self-determined pioneer but as a heteronomous, self-deceiving and desperate individual who can neither emancipate his own mind, nor his own will, from the imperative of speed:

> People sitting around talking, quietly, in undertones. 'The very best ribbon. The very best. I know what I am talking about. In the business thirty years. The very best. And cheap!' [...]
>
> All around him men trying to get ahead. Men forging ahead. Using all of their wits, all of their powers. Building. Building. Creating new things. Selling. Buying. Exchanging.
>
> And so was he. So was he. He was trying to build too. He also was working. [...]

> Anyway, damn Glymmer. And damn Zuckor. Two old men. They had to get out of the way. Too old. Make room for new blood. Fresh blood. Young energy. [...]
>
> We must get ahead. Forge ahead.
>
> And the next office would be larger. Would employ more people. Create more work. More people would be employed. More people would be taken care of.
>
> Why, he was actually doing good work. Enlarging things. Making things bigger. Cutting out the dry wood and selecting fresh, strong timber.
>
> He looked again at his watch. A quarter to nine. Another fifteen minutes. In another fifteen minutes he would begin things again. Would start building again.
>
> After all a man like him couldn't get lost. Couldn't starve or suffer. Energy. Strength. Determination. Do or die. [...]
>
> You must plan, must work, must fight. Things don't come out of their own accord. You must fight for them. Must struggle for them.
>
> And if you do, if you fight hard enough, you can't fail. Things must come your way. (*Office* 260–62)

This passage perfectly evokes the strategy of "search[ing] for change and novelty," which Ehn and Löfgren identify as a coping mechanism that people adopt to counter the experience that time is passing while they are idle (56). Read's mind turns constantly from one external or internal stimulus to the next in order to keep up its accustomed 'Wall-Street velocity.' The passage conveys the speed of this very movement by grouping short, often elliptical clauses in paragraphs. This syntactic-structural setup expresses the frequency at which Read's mind shifts back and forth between external stimuli, mental analyses and future planning as well as what could be called 're-assuring self-talk.' The first two paragraphs of the quoted passage indicate that the external stimulus 'business talk' aggravates Read's urge for self-discipline. The reason seems to be that Read encounters a material proof that the business world, embodied by the men opposite him, keeps moving forward while he waits. As the second paragraph illustrates, Read becomes aware that business men across the globe keep on exchanging existing goods and methods ('Selling. Buying. Exchanging') and keep on producing new accelerative products and techniques while he waits idly in the lobby ('Building. Building. Creating new things').

As the subsequent one-line paragraph suggests, the high velocity of business life throws Read into a state of panic because it alerts him to his own inactivity. As a result, Read attempts to change his subjective experience of waiting by engaging in re-assuring self-talk. He enters a disproportionately stressful mood and tries to calm himself by reasserting that, indeed, 'so was he. So was he. He was trying to build too. He also was working.' This act of self-assurance perfectly elucidates Read's compulsion to stay in the race; notably, even the phrases of his self-talk are terse and declarative. The two paragraphs that follow the phrase 'the next office would be larger' in the quoted passage illustrate the same coping strategy. The metaphor of 'cutting out the dry wood' here signals that Read assures himself that he is about to economize his business so that his future employees ('fresh, strong timber') achieve more in less time.

Notably, this last instance of re-assuring self-talk follows a phase in which Read occupies his mind with an analysis of his former business problems as well as with his new plan of action. Through such meaningful acts, Ehn and Löfgren point out, people who are waiting commonly counteract the feeling that they let time pass idly.[265] The same is evoked by the narrative design of "Mr. Read," which conveys that Read instantly re-occupies his mind after he has determined that he has to keep himself busy for another fifteen minutes before he can commence a new business venture ('In another fifteen minutes he would begin things again'): Read recalls the imperatives of modern American business life and assures himself that he knows and follows them ('Energy. Strength. Determination. Do or die. You must plan, must work, must fight').

As the narrative, with each paragraph, moves back and forth between the external stimuli to which Read turns, the mental analyses and future planning in which he engages his mind as well as the re-assuring self-talk he performs, it refutes the contemporary association of mental speed with skill, control and success.[266] Instead, it illustrates that Read is desperate to reproduce "the swift and continuous shift of internal and external stimuli" that characterized metropolitan life at the time (Simmel, "Metropolis" 11). Read appears to be a helplessly normalized businessman who has lost the ability to decelerate his pace of life even for a moment.

Since this thoroughly adapted individual is the protagonist in the final story of *The Office*, the reader is invited to compare him to all the other characters she has encountered in the previous thirteen stories. She is invited to recognize that the failure does not turn Read into a disillusioned optimist like Marc Kranz or Harry Widener and that it does not enable him to counteract the effects of his synchronized life (alienation from his own self, from others and from place) in a suburban heterotopia, like Henry Clarke. The last story focuses on a 'successful' but failed businessman, who keeps whirling past the true values of life, lusts for short-lived satisfaction in light entertainment/courtship and does not muster the strength to emancipate his existence from the ever-propelling circle of acceleration, like Robert Michelet. At the end of Asch's novel, Read "walked in the direction of the bellboy [to meet his new business associates]. A new office was beginning" (*Office* 265). These final words assure the reader: Read will continue his life as before.

The editor of *The Neglected Books Page* is certainly right to claim that "[n]ot all opportunities are taken" by the characters of *The Office*. By claiming, however, that "[s]econd, skeptical thoughts come and undermine the first optimistic speculations about possibilities and bold choices" in

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[265] Ehn and Löfgren cite a university student, who verbalizes this compulsion to avoid the feeling of inactivity as follows: "In order not to suffer from stress, I always have a book or a magazine at hand. Then, waiting is not felt as meaningless, I have in any case done something. If I don't activate myself during the time that is only passing I lose my temper. I can't stand to just 'be,' all the time I must do something, otherwise time is wasted" (27, cf. 22).

[266] See for instance Williams' comments on mental speed in the preface to *Kora*, which I address in chapter II.C.1.

Asch's novel, the editor disregards the critical effect that emerges when narratives of (incipient) change and critical portrayals of people's entrapment in hyper-accelerated lifestyles are juxtaposed ("The Office, by Nathan Asch"). Just as *City Block*, *The Office* is marked by a generative optimism: both suggest that their ending signifies a new beginning. In *The Office,* this optimism emerges from within the fictional narrative, in which some characters adopt a disillusioned optimism and muster the strength to change their lives into a more gratifying form. Ultimately, "Mr. Read" appears designed to reinforce the impulse for activity and change, which these stories present to the reader on the level of content: Although the outlook of "Mr. Read" is rather bleak, it confronts the reader with another example of ignorance and mindless speed-pioneering which emphasizes the need for individual action once again, animating him to take action.

On yet another level, Asch's novel represents a new 'beginning:' With its aesthetic of in-betweenness (the combination of fast/new with slow/old styles) and its appropriation of common techniques of textual acceleration, it represents an alternate form of modern prose that is unique, yet comparable to Frank's *City Block*. As it is the case in *City Block*, the re-validation of slowness within the modern world, too, seems to be an objective that drives Asch's novel. Many stories, especially "Marc Kranz," "Henry Clarke" and "Harry Widener," illustrate that forms of slow thinking and slow acting have a restorative effect: they not only enable people to liberate themselves from the institutional structures and the practices that have hindered them to live a 'good life.' Slow thinking and acting also helps them to overcome their alienation from the space they inhabit and the people they encounter as well as from their own actions and 'selves.'

The temporally circular arrangement of *The Office* in section two, in fact, represents an extreme of narrative insistence: With each story, the narrative returns to the moment in which the office fails and recounts the day from yet another perspective. Consequently, it can be concluded that Asch's novel itself is engaged in an enormously decelerated process of contemplation in prose, though which it creates a collective quasi-memory of Glymmer, Read & Co.'s bankruptcy. This very memory, it seems, is meant to inform not only the characters' but also the readers' living and acting. The novel as such thus discredits the rash attitude of Read, who nervously rushes on to new ventures without taking a pause to contemplate the life he has led and the damage he has caused. *The Office* lingers on the moment of failure, slowly unravels its implications for different individuals and turns the void, which the failure has left (literally on the page), to good account. In this manner, *The Office* presents an approach that it encourages individuals beyond the novel to adopt, too: It slows down if required, it identifies and critically reflects upon the detrimental impact of speed, it challenges structures and practices that engender alienation and, finally, it seizes an alternate existence in which 'fast' and 'slow' co-exist harmoniously.

Both parts of this chapter have illuminated why Asch, as a twentieth-century American writer, as well as his novel *The Office*, scandalized, or at least baffled, many of their contemporaries. An important cause for this was that both sympathized (ideologically and aesthetically) with such diametrically opposed positions as avant-garde modernism, as it was conceptualized at the time, and left-wing criticism, yet never fully subscribed to either of these. Unlike the poet-prophet Marc Kranz, who feels that "[h]e could not revolt, he could not shout" in the metropolis (*Office* 102), both Asch and *The Office* openly challenged the pervasive time-regime and the well-known narratives of American speed-pioneering in the 1920s without ever reverting to a reactionary rhetoric.

In a modern America where, Asch felt, "millions of voices were shouting at one another" and people "did not have the time to stop running,"[267] Asch published *The Office* to confront his contemporaries with a scandalously unflinching critique of life and work in modern America – with a narrative that did not feature prominently in the overarching discourse of acceleration at the time. As my analysis has revealed, Asch's novel can indeed be understood as a precursor of 1930s' ultra-leftist prose since it critically assesses the ways in which capitalist institutions such as the stock exchange impact the life of white-collar workers. Inspired by the practice-oriented reform spirit of turn-of-the-century Progressivism, however, the critical diagnosis offered by *The Office* in 1925 is primarily set at the service of a larger generative agenda. Just as radical leftist prose in 1930s, reading *The Office* may have startled some American readers at the time. Asch, however, was as convinced as Frank that this was necessary to draw their attention to the downside of accelerated living and to animate them to think productively about coping mechanisms and alternative lifestyles.

Due to this insight, I contest Fadiman's claim that Asch did not "entirely succeed[] in solving that [aesthetic] problem" faced by American writers of the day (446). If we take it to have been Asch's aim to create a form of modern prose that has the potential to affect the reader deeply and, possibly, to animate him to take action, the conception of *The Office* appears both skillful and remarkably potent. Since three experimental 'chapters' first lead readers to understand *The Office* as a stylistic evocation of hyper-acceleration which joins in the celebratory chorus of the overarching discourse of acceleration, the rupture that occurs at the transition from the first to the second section presents itself as a particularly effective mechanism of disillusionment. It paves the way for the ethical critique and the generative vision, which unfold throughout the fourteen succeeding stories in *The Office*.

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[267] The quote is taken from the German version of *Love in Chartres* and translated by the author of this study. The original reads: "Millionen Stimmen auf einander einschrien;" "wo sie keine Zeit hatten stehenzubleiben" (Asch, *Liebe* 60).

While I consider it confirmed that both Frank and Asch succeeded in devising an aesthetic that likely transmits their critique and revalidates slowness, emotionality, deep social relations, self-determination and *Erfahrung*, the alternate visions they offer are not entirely clear. Certainly, Asch's novel formulates a much more accessible and much more coherent critique of life and work in the metropolis than *City Block*. Also its secular vision of the 'good life' is far less abstract and curious than *City Block*'s evocation of 'unity' and 'Wholeness.' In "Robert Michelet," *The Office* even suggests that divergent individuals such as Edith or Henry Clarke can guide others toward a better way of life. Nevertheless, *The Office* does not answer two fundamental questions: What could prompt individuals such as Gertrude Donovan, Robert Michelet or Mr. Read to permanently overcome their alienated, hyper-accelerated existences? How can individuals with alternate lifestyles and values (i.e., Henry Clarke or Harry Widener) prevail in an environment where acceleration has emerged as the norm within a regulative discourse?

In spite of their shortcomings, *City Block* and *The Office* represent a remarkable response to the first wave of acceleration, which should be recognized, rather than neglected due to their divergence form American literary modernism, as it was consolidated at the time. In the 1920s, their authors set out to counter the trend to adapt literary form and style to the temporal norm of the modern age in the field of American letters: speed. Against this trend, both Frank and Asch set their own prose, partly defying the imperative of speed-up and quasi-scientific experiment and instead offering a disillusioned but optimistic re-assessment of the ways in which these very imperatives affected individual and social life in metropolitan America. Although Frank and Asch did not form a movement or school of their own, the techniques that both of them used in their novels (appropriating techniques of textual speed-up, mixing 'old/slow' with 'new/fast' styles, etc.), the generative agenda that registers within these texts as well as the values they promote in the 1920s invite us to deduce from them an alternate practice of American experimental writing. To substantiate the understanding of this practice, the last case study will examine yet another 'alternate' writer – Mary Borden – and another actualization of the alternate practice in the novel *Flamingo or the American Tower*.

III.C. CRITICAL AND POPULAR, YET AMERICAN AND MODERN: THE INTERMEDIATE STANCE OF MARY BORDEN AND *FLAMINGO OR THE AMERICAN TOWER* (1927)

When the Mary Borden returned from Europe in 1930 to visit her hometown on the shore of Lake Michigan, the startling changes she observed in Chicago's urban landscape inspired her to write: "I saw quite another city, [...] the town of Chicago that I'd been born in [...] had vanished like magic" ("Chicago" 546). In the article "Chicago Revisited," which appeared in *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, Borden thus rhapsodizes about the modern, American quality of her mid-western hometown – its industrial vigor, economized circulation systems and unrelenting pace of change. In it, she quotes from Carl Sandburg's 1914 poem "Chicago" in order to describe her impressions of the city – from a poem that not only reveals the "grandeur of urban life" but also cuts "through a mystique about the country's second largest city," as Linda Wagner-Martin observes (2, 1).[268] While Waldo Frank saw a "newer generation" of organic and mystical writing emerge in Sandburg's work,[269] Borden sympathized with Sandburg, it seems, because he addressed both sides of urban modernity and never completely complied with the imperative of (aesthetic) innovation and acceleration – a stance for which Sandburg was attacked by self-proclaimed modernists such as William Carlos Williams at the time.[270] Borden's critical assessment of life in urban America resembles Nathan Asch's and Frank's because it was informed by the notion that the nation's centers are "in too much of a hurry to have any negative emotions [...]. [T]here's no room for doubt or hesitancy. Everything about the big, blustering place is positive and superlative" (Borden, "Chicago" 541).

Before I turn to Borden's novel *Flamingo or the American Tower* (1927), which was aesthetically and rhetorically designed to finally make room and time for a critical reconsideration of modernity's long-time effects in 1920s' America(n writing), a prefatory chapter will illuminate that Borden's disturbing experience of machine modernity during the First World War as well as her familiarity with European outlooks on speed-up inspired her to raise a critical, yet never purely alarmist voice within the discourse of acceleration that had emerged in her native country. This prefatory chapter will furthermore reveal that Borden gradually carved out a stance in-between 'the popular' and 'the modernist,' as these parameters were defined at the time, in the field of American letters. As the roaring 1920s unfolded, not only Asch and Frank but Borden, too, seems to have felt the need to write an alternate kind of experimental novel that would

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[268] Marshal McLuhan similarly calls the poem a "curious blend of democratic lyricism and megalomaniac brutality" (140).

[269] In *Our America,* Frank writes: "watch what happens to his words. [...] They have form. Strong, tender shoots of verse, exquisite, perfect, pushing up through the filth like grass upon the prairies. Lines just so clear and succulent and green. Direction just so dynamically upward" (135).

[270] In "a period close to forty years," Williams for instance wrote in a review of Sandburg's *Collected Poems*, "the poems show no development of the thought, in the technical handling of the material, in the knowledge of the forms, the art of treating the line. [...] All that can be said is that a horde [of poems] walks steadily, unhurriedly through its pages, [...] a monstrous kind of show [...]. Fatigue is the outstanding phenomenon" ("Carl Sandburg's" 277–278).

'transfigure' something, to use Frank's term: one that would critically, yet generatively address the effects of acceleration on individual and social life in the metropolis. Only five years after *City Block* and two years after *The Office*, Borden's novel *Flamingo* confounded many American readers with its unconventional technique, its unbiased assessment of acceleration and its alternate vision of modern life.

While Frank was driven by a religious incentive and Asch wrote *The Office* to process his experience as a Wall Street broker, the impulse for Borden, a similarly self-conscious writer, grew in equal terms out of the outlook she gained on the phenomenon of acceleration in Europe as well as out of her progressive, yet essentially middle-class stance. The latter did not lead her to categorically reject 'the new and fast.' Borden had a remarkably progressive take on gender politics and recognized that acceleration was essential to American progress. Nonetheless, she was unwilling to relinquish traditional values that she felt were at stake in modern America, just as Asch and Frank. Although Frank, Asch and Borden acted independently from one another and promoted unique visions of a better life in their 1920s' novels, there exist striking correspondences in the agendas as well as in the aesthetic and thematic strategies they opted for in their 1920s' novels to renegotiate the phenomenon of speed-up. These correspondences call for a classification of *City Block*, *The Office* and *Flamingo* as exemplars of a distinct practice of modern experimental writing. These novels were designed to diagnose and critique, to create awareness and to animate change at a time when speed-up proliferated as a norm and imperative throughout many spheres of American life.

III.C.1 IN-BETWEEN ASSOCIATION AND CRITIQUE: MARY BORDEN

Born in 1886 into a wealthy family, Borden grew up in a Chicago that was just undergoing a fundamental transformation. Industrialization came into its own, modern infrastructural networks were expanded and the first high-rise buildings were erected. During her studies of English and Philosophy at Vassar College, Borden regularly visited New York, the metropolis that soon surpassed Borden's mid-Western hometown in the height of its buildings and in the verve of its urban culture. Borden left American soil for Pakistan in 1908 to visit missionary settlements her parents supported and she lived in England and France with her first and second husbands, Douglas Turner and Edward Louis Spears, for the rest of her life (cf. Conway 23). Nevertheless, she remained actively involved in American matters, visited frequently and gradually earned a reputation as a popular American novelist and cultural commentator. Thus territorially distanced from her home country, she familiarized herself with an outside perspective on her native people's take on acceleration, which she, however, never completely adopted. Instead, she became a cultural intermediary – an American with a distinct insight into the overarching discourse of acceleration who was equipped with an equally deep understanding of the negative repercussions of acceleration through first-hand encounters with modern warfare and European perspectives. Accordingly, Borden positioned herself in-between enthusiasts of progress/speed-up and anti-modernist, backward-looking alarmists, combining an unbiased (sometimes even sympathetic) understanding with a critical awareness. This intermediate stance registers in the style, theme and agenda of *Flamingo* as well.

A crucial period for Borden's transformation into the cultural intermediary she eventually became was the Great War, during which she volunteered for the French Red Cross and, in 1915, set up the first mobile field hospital in Flanders.[271] To collect donations for this venture, she wrote to American newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *Brooklyn Life*, who enthusiastically supported her appeal and reprinted parts of her letters.[272] Re-read through the lens of temporality, the reprinted passages are striking because they relate modern warfare in a way that was likely to entice thrill-craving American readers. Borden's epistles focus on technologies of acceleration which had transformed the nature and experience of twentieth-century warfare and modern life in equal measure: The line "tremendous whirring of [...] French biplanes, glistening like gold, ris[ing] straight overhead and giv[ing] chase" (qtd. in "American Girl" C3) seems designed to target American readers' fascination with speed technology.[273] Borden's account of the "sky [...] a-whirr with aeroplanes [...] and all the time, troops and troops and more troops stream past" (qtd. in G. H. H. 19) evokes the dynamism of urban America not only on the level of content but by way of alliteration and repetition, too. The quoted passages reveal how sensitively Borden employed rhetoric and style in her letters to recommend herself (and her war effort) to American readers. They suggest that Borden was distinctly aware of the great vogue of thrill and speed that swept America at the time – a vogue that even led many to naively approach the technologized war in Europe as a spectacle. At the time, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, for instance, endorsed the plan of John Borden, Mary's brother, to tour the European battlefields in "pursuit of new sensations" in a front-page article titled "Borden, Thrill Fan, to Look 'Em Over in Battle Areas: Rich Adventurer, Bored by Loop, to Motor Through War. May Film a Little" (1). While Mary Borden still exploited her compatriots' enthusiasm about 'the new and fast' war for her own financial benefit in 1915, she later openly denounced their apparent tendency to glorify speed.

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[271] *L'Hôpital Chirurgical Mobile No 1* was set in operation in July 1915. Borden had enlisted at the London Committee of the French Red Cross and first worked at, and then managed, a field hospital in Dunkirk before she filed an application for her own field hospital. The hospital, the first of its kind, was to be located close to the front. Borden was the first of only two American women to ever receive the *Croix de Guerre* (cf. Conway 38). American newspapers showed a great interest in Borden's involvement. For coverage in the *Chicago Daily Tribune,* see for instance the full-page portrait of Borden "Chicago Founder of Field Hospital" in the September 5, 1915 issue, John T. McCutcheon's illustrated article "Mrs. Borden Turner's Hospital" in the October 18, 1915 issue or the portrait of Borden, which appeared next to portraits of the Crown Prince Boris of Bulgaria, the German secretary of the treasury and King Constantine of Greece in the "In the Limelight" section of the October 24, 1915 issue. An announcement about Borden's hospital work, titled "The Helping Hand," appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on November 7, 1915.

[272] The "Society and Entertainments" section as well as the "Comment by Mme X" (both *Chicago Daily Tribune*) furthermore announced that a vaudeville show was organized at the house of Borden's brother's to collect donations (cf. "Garden Fete;" "Hospital Aid Dance").

[273] The same holds true for Borden's descriptions in another letter reprinted in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*: "The sound of the guns last night was so curious [...] – an incessant, rapid throbbing of cannon, as rapid as the ticking of the telegraph" (qtd. in "Ambulance" E5).

The literary texts Borden wrote during and after her First World War service represent her first attempt at shaping a distinctly modern form of writing. In the July 1916 issue of *The English Review*, Borden published two critical "War Vignettes" under the pseudonym Bridget McLagan – perhaps because she was still cautious to publicly associate herself with critics of modern technology at this point in time. In "Rousbrugge," an I-as-protagonist narrator openly critiques the changes that military technology wrought on his native village, calling the stream of motors "a noisy, stinking serpent [...] writhing through the village, flinging dust into the houses—dust and germs of greed and sickness" (19, 20). The third-person narrator of "Bombardment" describes the inexorability of air-borne bombing in an equally critical tone: "as if exorcised by the magic eye of that insect [the airplane], a cluster of houses collapsed and crumbled into fragments, while a roar burst from the wounded earth" (15). In both vignettes, however, there registers an "unwilling fascination" with the spectacle of modern technology and warfare as well, as Jan Montefiore adequately observes (73; cf. A. Freedman 116): These texts recognize that acceleration, even in war-settings, may have an experiential appeal. This unbiased admission distinguishes Borden's 'intermediate' texts from both exclusively denouncing and overly idealist responses to technological acceleration in battle and beyond. In Borden's vignettes, the element of fascination is lodged in a phrase such as "aeroplane, superbly poised in the spotless sky" ("Bombardment" 15) and, most notably, in Borden's attempt to speed-up her texts in order to evoke the thrill of technological warfare in the literary text. A stylistically fast passage in "Rousbrugge," for instance, lines up diverse sensual stimuli to evoke the protagonist's intense, exiting encounter with the panorama of technological war-organization in his home village: "Smoke and dust, the smell of petrol, hurrying figures, rushing motors, ambulances, motor lorries, wagons full of meat or timber, motor cycles whizzing" (19). To transport the experiential appeal of this panorama into the reading experience, Borden experiments with tonal and syntactic sequencing in "Bombardment" as well:

> This way and that they [people in the village] scurried, diving into cellars. Motors rushed like swift beetles through the streets. White jets of steam rose from the locomotives in the station-yard. The harbour throbbed. [...] With a last flick of its [the airplane's] glittering wings it darted downward, defiant, dodging the kisses of shrapnel, luring them, teasing them, playing. (15-16)

With four declarative sentences, the first half of this passage relates the battle scene. In this tight sequence, it describes the fast, simultaneous operation of four actors: people run, motorized vehicles speed, combustion engines run in locomotives and warships fire back incessantly from the harbor. A gradual economization is used in this passage to render the thrill of this situation perceptible: Each sentence is shorter than the preceding one; the text cuts back on the subordinate clause in the first sentence, the simile in the second, and, finally, even the acting subject (war ships) is omitted. The second part of the quote equally evokes the spectacle of modern warfare. Taking the attraction of the airplane into focus, it not only describes the sensual stimuli produced by the airplane (the glitter, the darting downward). Furthermore, the relatively short sentences recreate the experience of intense stimulation by way of including an alliterative pattern (‘*d*arted *d*ownward, *d*efiant, *d*odging’), which has a syntactically unembedded attribute (‘defiant’) at its center, as well as a startling metaphor (‘kisses’ for ‘blows’) and a sequence of three short (repetitive) sub-clauses. These experiments with tonal and syntactic sequencing resemble acclaimed techniques of textual speed-up and they reveal Borden’s attempt to evoke the thrilling experiential pace (i.e., the crowding of experiences in a set timespan) of modern warfare in her texts – an attempt in line with the objectives that Williams and others propagated it at the time (see chapter II.C).

The three free-verse poems titled “At the Somme,” which appeared in *The English Review* in August 1917 and were re-published in revised form in Borden’s collection *The Forbidden Zone* in 1929, illustrate that Borden continued her endeavor to combine a critique of technologically accelerated warfare and a stylistic evocation of its experiential intensity in her literary texts. This approach diverged from that of her speed-minded compatriot Ernest Hemingway, who declared at the time that “[w]ar is the best subject of all” since “[i]t groups the maximum of material and speeds up the action and brings out all sorts of stuff that normally you would have to wait a lifetime to get” (qtd. in S. G. Freedman). Borden’s war poetry combines syntactic forms of rhythmic sequencing (repetition and enumeration) with phonetic roughening (alliteration)[274] to impart the cascade of sensual stimulation that constitutes the experience of modern warfare: “the *l*ong roads *l*ike *l*iquid torrents, ro*ll*ing up with guns and *m*unitions and *m*en and *m*ore *m*en, with these long *r*oads *r*o*ll*ing up *l*ike a *r*iver” (“Jehovah” 98, emphases added). By including this tightly sequenced series of stimuli in her texts, Borden signaled that she was trying to recreate the temporality of modern technology. Additionally, she paraded her expertise in aesthetic techniques that avant-garde writers in her home country propagated at the time. The war experience, however, had turned Borden into a cultural intermediary, whose understanding of the speed-thrill merged with a growing critical awareness. As a result, her poem “The Hill” addresses both the “marvelous spectacle,” the “beautiful, [...] superb, exulting” (temporal) quality of modern technological speed, as the "despair" and the "rubbish, old shell-cases, and boots, and battered helmets" (102, 101, 102, 102).[275] Distancing herself from the enthusiasm about speed-up in her home country, Borden wrote texts that stylistically evoke the spectacle and, on the level of content, emphasize the suffering and cruelty inflicted by modern technological warfare. These texts express their author's intermediate stance.

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[274] Angela K. Smith describes Borden’s use of similar techniques to create rhythm in *Forbidden Zone* (cf. 88). Laurie Kaplan claims that “forms of *repetitio* create an internal structure that sustains an overwhelming sense of monotony and horror” within it (37).

Flamingo, which was published ten years later, exemplifies a refinement of Borden's technique. In it, Borden uses a hybrid aesthetic that transfers her position of in-betweenness completely to the stylistic composition of the novel: In *Flamingo*, 'fast/modern' and 'slow/traditional' passages are juxtaposed to transmit a critique, as the second part of this case study will demonstrate. Borden might have been inspired to thus refine her technique because she got the impression that a fast text possibly "masks the threatening violence of its subject," as Ariela Friedman suggests in an essay on Borden's war poetry (116). In any case, Borden seems to have realized, as Asch and Frank did at the time as well, that she could communicate her critique of the phenomenon (and of the discourse) of acceleration even more powerfully if she stopped trying to make it operative in texts that perfectly reproduced the speed of modern life.

The stylistic intermediacy of *Flamingo* grew out of Borden's experiments with textual temporalization in her war writing, yet it was equally informed by the rather conventional prose she had published to great acclaim since 1909.[276] Borden had launched her career as a popular American writer with two short stories set in India, which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*'s February and March 1909 issues, as well as with the semi-autobiographical novel *Mistress of Kingdoms* (1912), all of which include religious and gender-related themes. At a time when "[m]odernism excluded whatever was associated with the fatally popular ladies" (Clark 16), Borden showed herself reluctant to adapt her aesthetic completely to the modern temporal regime, made a case for a progressive gender politics, and was still well-disposed towards older and slower narrative modes, which secured her income. While she was aspiring to entice the cultivated readership of modernist magazines with her experimental short texts, Borden targeted a mass audience with her novels. Borden's publishers accordingly placed advertisements in general interest newspapers, which emphasize the appeal of the "amazing and sensational picture" of American and British high society that her prose paints and praise the author's aptitude for characterization as well as the "thrilling" plots she creates[277] – plots that capitalize on the themes of nineteenth-century sentimental fiction (society, family, marriage, spirituality): "A woman of fashion and extreme beauty. A husband, dull, stolid, immersed in affairs of state. What more natural than that she should respond to the appeal of the more dashing lover? Mary Borden has written a very fine and moving novel," reads an advertisement for *The Tortoise* (1921), for instance, which appeared on August 28, 1921 in the *New York Times*.[278] Nonetheless, Borden's novels are marked by a progressive outlook on gender-related issues and make a case for resilient, "independent-minded heroine[s]" (Conway 29). While both Asch and Frank associated themselves with the left-wing avant-garde to establish their distance from an allegedly a-political and (stylistically) conformist group of American modernists, Borden supported the fight for women's rights. In 1913, she was even arrested and sent to jail for five days for throwing stones during a suffragette protest in front of the Houses of Parliament (cf. Conway 27-28).[279] Meanwhile, Borden carved out her intermediate stance by moving freely back and forth between both ends of the literary spectrum – between avant-gardist experimentation in little magazines and popular fiction-writing.

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[275] See Max Saunder's essay "War Literature, Bearing Witness, and the Problem of Sacralization: Trauma and Desire in the Writing of Mary Borden and Others" for an insightful analysis of the "problematic" and "disturbing" aspect of "ambivalent feelings" in Borden's *Forbidden Zone*, where she establishes a "relation between suffering and pleasure; between war and excitement" (181).

[276] Her return to the USA in mid-1924 even attracted attention on "The Gossip Page" of *The Mercury* (cf. Conway 125).

[277] The advertisement that appeared in the *New York Times* promotes *The Romantic Woman* a "sensational novel" and underlines that it is "purporting to be the autobiography of the daughter of a well-known Chicago millionaire" (11 Apr. 1920, BR169); in the October 10, 1920 issue, an advertisement calls it "[a]n impressive novel of the Middle West and

Borden's experimental texts as well as her conventional novels found general acclaim[280] but the fact that Borden soon began to challenge the rigid stylistic borders between 'the conventional and slow' and 'the experimental and fast' and intercalated formally striking techniques in her prose confounded both publishers and readers.[281] From an oscillation between stylistic extremes in different texts, Borden began to gravitate toward the middle – an approach which registers prominently in *Flamingo*'s aesthetic of in-betweenness.[282] Writing in 2009, Jane Conway praises the time shifts in *The Romantic Woman* (1916) as "an early precursor to the experimental modernist

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English society." See the advertisement for *The Romantic Woman* published on March 13, 1920 in *The Nation* as well as the advertisements for *Jane – Our Stranger* appearing on 5 January and in the March issue of *The Spectator* and *The Bookman*, respectively.

[278] See the advertisements for *The Romantic Woman* in the *New York Times* (11 Apr. 1920, 10 Oct. 1920) and *The Nation* (8 May 1920) as well as F. H.'s review "Time and Eternity." Similarly telling advertisements for *Jericho Sands* (1926) appeared in *The American Mercury* (Jan 1926), *The Living Age* (20 Feb. 1926) and *The Times* (13 Feb. 1925). After Borden's death, *The London Times* commented in an obituary that "most of her novels were [...] somewhat narrowly confined to the experience of the very rich and exalted and in the result were stamped by a certain conventionality of outlook" ("Miss Mary Borden"). The *New York Times* wrote that her novels "dwelt on romantic themes with a background of the wealthy and fashionable characters with whom she was familiar" ("Mary Borden, Novelist, Is Dead"). *The Bracknell News* called her the "chronicler of a cosmopolitan luxury culture" ("Death of Lady Spears").

[279] For examples of Borden's political writings on gender equality and marriage politics, see her treatise *The Technique of Marriage* (1933) as well as her essay "Man, the Master" that appeared besides tongue-in-cheek commentaries on gender equality by Gertrude Stein, Josephine West and others in the volume *Man Proud Man* in 1932.

[280] When Borden's war poetry was published as *Forbidden Zone*, Geoffrey T. Hellman wrote in *The New Republic* that "[t]here is a poetic, 'literary' quality to Miss Borden's writing" (357).

[281] In this respect, Borden's approach resembles the experimental, yet commercially successful 'middlebrow modernisms' that Joan Shelley Rubin, Meredith Goldsmith, Lisa Botshon and others have reclaimed for modernist studies. For a study exclusively concerned with the experimental in middlebrow writing, see Allison Fisher's unpublished dissertation *Submerged Experimentation in Middlebrow Modernist Fiction* (2011).

[282] See Ann-Marie Einhaus' outstanding essay, which argues that Borden was already using two "conflicting modes" in her Great War Poems. Einhaus shows that on the one hand, Borden gives "an eyewitness account – seemingly unmediated and objective – that fulfils realist demands on war writing as truth-rendering, while on the other hand it seeks to cater for an interest in stylistic sophistication by the originality of its imagery and by unusual structure and syntax" (297).

techniques which became common among the writers of the 1920s" (64). When the novel first appeared, Borden's publishers seemed anxious to account for these uncommon experimental techniques. Their advertisements vaguely address the novel's "real literary and artistic value," yet instantly assure the potential reader that *The Romantic Woman* can still provide light entertainment, thus reinforcing the distinction between popular and high-brow literature that Borden was beginning to blur: "At any rate, it is an enjoyable reading," an advertisement in the May 8, 1920 issue of *The Nation* claims. While a review in *The Nation* praised the style of *The Romantic Woman* as having a "quality like the bluish shimmer of steel" ("Great Adventure" 625), reviewers generally made a dash at the nonconformity of Borden's prose, decrying it as a sign of incapability. They identified "an appearance of desultoriness in the book's narrative method" or criticized elements that allegedly complicated enjoyment in favor of an "intellectual level" ("Great Adventure;" Hartley, "New Fiction" 600). Similarly, reviewers of *Three Pilgrims and A Tinker* (1924) and *A Woman with White Eyes* (1930) expressed the feeling that Borden "writes with an ease and quickness of expression" but "sometimes overreaches herself and comes out with a common poeticism" (Carducci 706) or they claimed that her "intricate plot and stylistic innovations had resulted in a confusing novel, detracting from its power" (Conway 151). Evidently, reviewers outside of avant-garde magazines were particularly sensitive to a mass-readership's expectations, for whom the experiments by Cummings and Stein often still represented a sensational curiosity.[283] As a result, they either downplayed or elicited open disapproval for Borden's experiments with literary form and narrative technique. At the same time, the fact that Borden inserted her experiments into largely conventional prose narratives disqualified her as a literary avant-gardist.

In avant-garde circles, Borden's association with the expatriate modernist scene was duly recognized. Gertrude Stein, for instance, writes self-celebratingly in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* that Borden had the potential "to be a writer" since "[s]he was very enthusiastic about the work of Gertrude Stein and travelled with what she had of it [...] to and from the front." At the same time, however, Stein suggests that Borden was not part of the avant-garde like herself but a hostess, an American millionaire and, after all, still "very Chicago" (185). Not only Stein was skeptical about Borden's apparent aspiration to become part of the avant-garde. E.M. Forster, for instance, "felt she was using her inheritance to buy her way into the London literary scene" (Conway 31). During the first decades of the new century, Borden indeed established connections to acclaimed American-born modernists such as Ezra Pound (Conway cf. 3, 33, 35) and was inspired by vorticist art and literature, which Pound and Wyndham Lewis had co-welded into a form in which “experience continually rushes” (Pound, “Vortex” 154).[284] Quite paradoxically, Borden was indirectly discrediting her own popular novels when she promoted literary experimenters who stylized themselves as “the great enemies of Romance” (R. Adlington et al. 41) and who campaigned for “maximum energy” and the “greatest efficiency” in modern verse (Pound, “Vortex” 154). Borden even purchased a stack of *Blast* copies to distribute on her own (cf. Conway 35).

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[283] In her insightful study *Marketing Modernism Between the Two World Wars*, Catherine C. Turner examines the effort by publishing houses to sell high-brow modernism to a mass audience.

Although she was well aware that it would compromise her reputation in avant-garde circles, Borden continued to write popular prose and, at times, even publicly distanced herself from the avant-garde. In this respect, she differs from the elitist writer Waldo Frank. In a well-frequented lecture at the Chicago Art Club in 1930, she not only professed that “[w]hen they [writers of the Bloomsbury Group] found out that I had published a [popular] book a year for ten years, they didn’t know what to make of it.” She self-confidently added that she found ‘modernist’ aesthetics and practices “too wild and woolly” (qtd. in Conway 151). Although Borden was quite capable of producing fast texts and her quick pace of production might have generally qualified her as an efficient American writer, she did not anticipate Stein’s self-promotional move to stylize herself as a ‘typically American modernist’ according to the criteria that were just being discursively established in her home country: She instead distanced herself from the literary avant-garde and continued to do well with fast-produced novels that use predominantly ‘old/slow’ styles to tell conventional tales. In 1927, she published the stylistically hybrid novel *Flamingo* to confront her readers with a counter-discursive reading of accelerated life in urban America.

The distinct perspective Borden gained on the speed craze from across the Atlantic was another immediate influence upon her conflicted relation to the avant-garde as well as to the overarching discourse of acceleration in America. It was the combination of this outside perspective with a deep insight into the American discourse that made her a cultural intermediary. In essays and public appearances, she frequently and self-confidently raised her voice with authority on American affairs, articulating her alternate outlook on accelerated lifestyles in urban America.[285] At the time, American commentators took note of Borden’s intermediate stance. In his 1920 essay "Contemporary American Novelists," the critic Carl van Doren for instance acutely observes that Borden "surveys with liking the simple virtues which are found in Chicago," yet "[s]till, she looks at Chicago from the post of a secure outsider, sometimes vexed, sometimes smiling, sometimes ready with approbation, but always critical" ("Contemporary" 411; cf. "Time and Eternity").[286]

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[284] Borden became a patron of modernist art, most notably so of Lewis’ vorticist paintings. She admired Lewis as “a great artist” and commissioned him to paint six paintings, some of which were shown in exhibitions of vorticist paintings at the Doré Gallery (London, opening on June 10, 1915) (qtd. in Conway 35).

[285] See especially Borden’s articles “French Morals” and “Superstitions.” Borden was often summoned to speak publicly on these matters, for instance with a lecture on “Looking at the United States and Great Britain Through Field-glasses” at the October 1946 meeting of the American Women’s Club in London (“Luncheons” 7). Borden’s conflicted stance on American matters disconcerted the English modernist Ford Madox Ford in 1930, with whom she held a debate on manners and American women in New York. During this debate, she “refused flatly” to adopt the ‘con’ side the organizer had appointed to her and to “attack her compatriots” as she commonly did, as Ford claim after the debate. Ford commented that “it was of course one thing to be bitchy from the safe distance of Westminster but another to do it here in the middle of her family” (qtd. in Conway 185).

The socio-critical essays Borden published throughout the 1920s and 1930s illustrate the strategy of alternation, which she employs in *Flamingo* to generate a critical effect. In her essay "Chicago Revisited," Borden initially summons her American readers to revel in the thrill of American urbanity:

> Go there, as I did. Get out of your train and walk up Michigan Avenue. I defy you not to respond to the excitement in the air, not to feel the drumming pulse of the great dynamo beating in your own veins, not to throw your hat to the sky and shout. Beautiful! How beautiful it is as you whirl northward past the Tribune tower, cross the river, and make for the Lake Shore Drive. Palaces rise to your left, the lake shimmers to your right. On you go, fast, so fast. ("Chicago" 541)

In this passage, Borden uses imperative constructions to invite her readers to open themselves up to the sensual experience of urban modernity, which, she promises, will fill them with a feeling of enthusiasm so great that it seeks immediate expression (i.e., throwing the hat, shouting). In the last three sentences, she shifts from this positive portrayal of sensual stimulation to the experience of technical acceleration, that is, driving rapidly through the city by car – an act that intensifies the feeling of awe upon encountering the high-rise buildings of the Chicago skyline. In the passages that follow, however, Borden departs abruptly from this reproduction of the well-known narrative of American speed-pioneering. She directs the reader's attention to the 'other' side of urban modernity, which was pushed into the far back of the collective consciousness as the discourse of acceleration proliferated (see chapter II): She describes Chicago as "a boiling explosive mixture" of lawlessness, a "turbulent torrent of primitive life" and a social malaise "that hasn't had time to simmer down." The awe-inspiring vertical landscape now figures as an uncontrollable concoction of "monstrous spells" through which "towers of steel had spurted into the air like geysers [...] and great blocks of marble had gone hurtling through space," destroying Borden's beloved childhood "town of Chicago" (Borden, "Chicago" 543). Out of this disillusioning portrayal, however, emerges a visionary optimism, which the previous case studies identify in *City Block* and *The Office* as well:

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[286] Borden's American publisher Alfred A. Knopf relativized her critical outlook by stating that she "naturally utilizes" her "intimacy" with American society, with which she had been "keep[ing] in close touch," as well as "the customs and characters of her adopted people with a knowledge of her American readers and a recognition of their point of view" (ad of *Jericho Sands* in *The Living Age*, 20 Feb. 1926). Much later, Borden herself said in a telephone address to a Dr. Rarrur of Boston University that "I love England and believe in the English people. [...] [B]ut after trying to understand them for forty years they remain baffling. The truth is I am not at home here. My home is in your side of the Atlantic" (Borden, *Spoken over the Telephone* 2).

> Chicago had something new, and I saw that it had. I didn't know what it would be. I could not see how order was to be brought forth out of this disorder, [...] I seemed to see it that day moving, twisting, growing, being shaped [...]. And I knew that the strange creature that would emerge would be America. I stared fascinated. I stared with a growing excitement [...] and when at last I went away, I was conscious of only one desire, to come back again so that I could see again what was happening in this astounding place. I wanted to be in it. ("Chicago" 547)

Disillusioned by acceleration's negative effects but optimistically believing in the nation's potential, Borden thus raised her critical, yet generative voice in the 1920s. Just as Asch and Frank, she was well aware that this might cause "some of my American readers [...] [to] snort like war horses and cavort and toss their heads and be glad they weren't born in that slow safe country" of Great Britain, as she writes in another of her socio-critical essays ("English Climate" 31). Nevertheless, all three authors independently countered the unequivocally optimistic rhetoric of their compatriots time and again.

MARKETING AND CLASSIFYING *FLAMINGO* DURING THE ROARING TWENTIES

When *Flamingo* was published in the United Kingdom and America in 1927, its combination of stylistic speed and optimism with 'old/slow' styles and a critical re-negotiation of acceleration prompted *Flamingo*'s publisher Doubleday, Page and Co. to market the novel as a particularly thrilling popular text– and it left many American reviewers disconcerted. In a 1927 review of *Flamingo* that appeared in *The Saturday Review*, L.P. Hartley for instance mocks the "tremendous play of intellectual thunder-and-lightning" in which Borden allegedly "gets things by the wrong" and calls the plot overcrowded. "She gets so much in, too much," Hartley laments, and concludes that *Flamingo* appears "over-driven and short of breath" (742). Similarly, Louis Kronenberger asserts in his review of the novel that *Flamingo* "eludes all sense of form, all basic unity" and, as Hartley, he attributes this to Borden's lack of authorial talent (qtd. in Eckman 131).[287]

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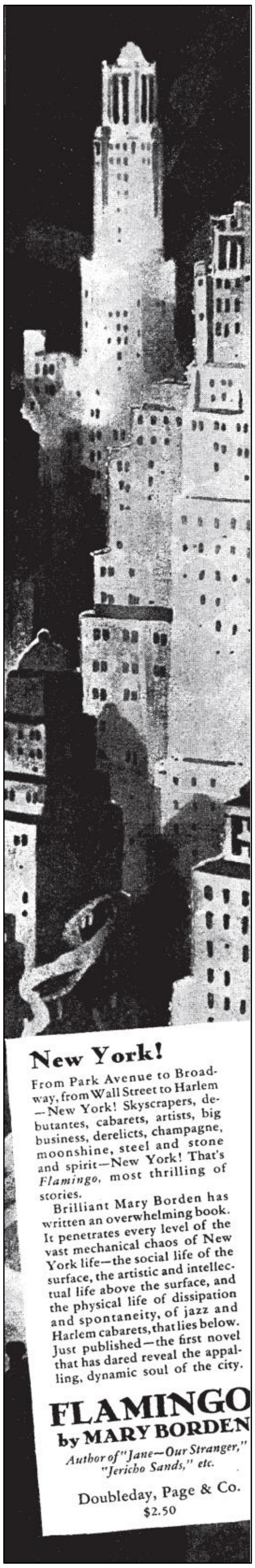
[287] In an exchange with her editor J. Kernan concerning changes to her novel *For the Record* (1950), Borden reacts to similar denunciations as follows: "The Editor seems to find great difficulty with my flash backs and flash forwards, in fact with my whole way of handling time. But this is inherent in the structure of the book and very carefully done. What the Editor calls 'premature' is a suggestion of what is to come" (Borden, "Letter to J. Kernan" 3).



New York!

From Park Avenue to Broadway, from Wall Street to Harlem—New York! Skyscrapers, debutantes, cabarets, artists, big business, derelicts, champagne, moonshine, steel and stone and spirit—New York! That's *Flamingo*, most thrilling of stories.

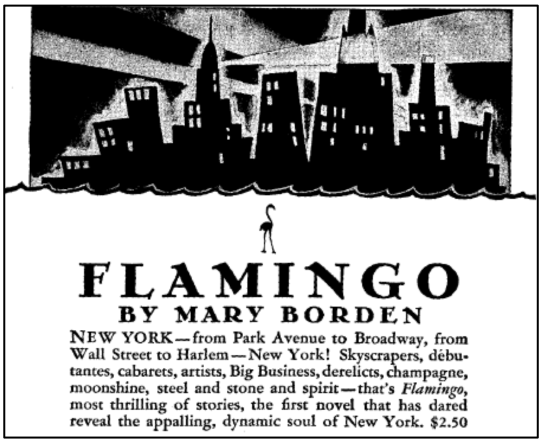
Brilliant Mary Borden has written an overwhelming book. It penetrates every level of the vast mechanical chaos of New York life—the social life of the surface, the artistic and intellectual life above the surface, and the physical life of dissipation and spontaneity, of jazz and Harlem cabarets, that lies below. Just published—the first novel that has dared reveal the appalling, dynamic soul of the city.

FLAMINGO
by MARY BORDEN
Author of "Jane—Our Stranger," "Jericho Sands," etc.

Doubleday, Page & Co.
$2.50

FIGURE 8: Advertisement for *Flamingo* in *The Saturday Review*, October 1927.

While American reviewers evidently attacked Borden for experimenting with style, form and fast narration, the author's reviewers across the Atlantic were more willing to recognize the novel's "very unusual" construction ("Flamingo, by Mary Borden") for its own virtue. They praised its "great knowledge and insight into" both American and British "temperament" (Connoly 359) and favorably emphasized the realistic portrayal "of the [characters'] fall from fullness of life into a vacuum, a place empty of the desire to live" once they are confronted with the "spirit of New York [that] strides, gigantic, through these pages, dwarfing the human spirits" (Powell 185). In a review that appeared in the social sciences journal *Social Forces*, the critic G.G.J. even proclaims that *Flamingo*, "notwithstanding advertisements to the contrary, is not a daring one of the private life of New York's higher social set" but a "confused picture of sky scrapers, Harlem cabarets, and the offices of big business" (171).



FLAMINGO
BY MARY BORDEN

NEW YORK—from Park Avenue to Broadway, from Wall Street to Harlem—New York! Skyscrapers, débutantes, cabarets, artists, Big Business, derelicts, champagne, moonshine, steel and stone and spirit—that's *Flamingo*, most thrilling of stories, the first novel that has dared reveal the appalling, dynamic soul of New York. $2.50

FIGURE 9: Advertisement for Mary Borden's novel in *The American Mercury*, November 1927.

As G.G.J. rightly notes, Borden's American publisher emphasized *Flamingo*'s thrilling subject matter and its terse stylistic and formal arrangement much more strongly in their advertisements than the 'other' facets that exist in the novel (scenes in rural America, the romance plot, 'decelerated' passages). In the two exemplary advertisements reprinted here (see figures 8 and 9), Borden's publisher targets thrill, novelty and speed – the consumer desires allegedly shared by the self-consciously sophisticated readers of H.L. Mencken's *American Mercury* and the middle-class readers of Henry Seidel Canby's *Saturday Review*. In both ads, a spectacular panorama of New York skyscrapers provides the background for a blurb that resembles contemporary film announcements in the way it stylistically prefigures the rate of thrills (allegedly) provided by this structurally fast-moving and thematically exhilarating novel: 'NEW YORK – from Park Avenue to Broadway, from Wall Street to Harlem – New York! Skyscrapers, debutantes, cabarets, artists, Big Business, derelicts, champagne, moonshine, steel and stone and spirit – that's *Flamingo,* most thrilling of stories, the first novel that has dared reveal the appalling, dynamic soul of New York' (see figure 9).[288] Certainly, all of these elements appear in Borden's novel, yet *Flamingo* is much more than a sequence of thrilling events or vistas, as the following analysis will reveal.

My own reading of *Flamingo* follows reviewers who were less eager to pigeonhole the novel as either a 'failed' modernist text or an overambitious conventional novel. Only few reviewers recognized the alternative virtue of Borden's hybrid fiction at the time: Among them counts Joseph Anthony. In his review, he calls Borden an "experimenter," yet unlike critics celebrating modern American author-engineers, he uses the metaphor of a tailor to praise her "different sort" of approach. In *Flamingo*, he explains, "a strikingly unusual pattern is cut from a full-woven and valid story." Ultimately, Anthony claims, Borden thus does not find herself in the same position as those literary experimenters who self-confidently concede that theirs "may not be a very good piece of cloth, but see how marvellously it's cut" (633).[289]

III.C.2 BALANCING OUT THE NEW AND FAST: MARY BORDEN'S *FLAMINGO OR THE AMERICAN TOWER*

> [S]trong in the faith of the Pilgrim Fathers, wielding the mighty double-axe of youth and ignorance, equipped with brand new armor made in Hollywood [...], organized by such geniuses for mass production and distribution as Mr. Henry Ford, bands of American Crusaders are ready to start out at any moment in any direction [...] to save and Americanize the world, any old world. They don't like the old world; [...] They don't approve of it, they don't understand it [...], they want to make it new.
>
> Mary Borden. "French Morals," 1930 (567)

When Mary Borden published *Flamingo* in 1927, she confronted a diverse American readership with a novel that was designed to confound both avant-garde and mainstream commentators. With *Flamingo*, Borden does not participate in the race for innovation, in which a considerable number of actors in fields such as American industrial manufacturing and architecture, Hollywood filmmaking and avant-garde letters seemed engaged at the time. Going against this pervasive trend, Borden refused to dispense altogether with 'the slow and old' in her novel. Instead, she combined it with 'the fast and new' to generate a critical effect. Consequently, *Flamingo* presents itself as a modern novel of a different kind: One that is designed to critique and counter the acts of 'American speed-crusaders,' who failed to consider the impact that an elimination of everything old and slow might have on individual and social life in America.

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[288] The responses that Borden's English publisher Heinemann reprints in its advertisements reduce the novel to the same quality: "an atmosphere of enormous pressure and speed" that "leaves one breathless with admiration" write the *Times Literary Supplement* and *The Sketch* (*The Times* 7 Dec. 1927); the British novelist Susan Ertz is quoted saying that the novel "hums and throbs and roars like a dynamo" (*Saturday Review* 5 Nov. 1927).

[289] Similarly, the reviewer D.B.W. praised the "nervous, jangling style and grating idiom" that sporadically appears in Borden's novel and emphasized that *Flamingo* includes both critical ("angrily cynical") and "visionary" elements (79).

The following close readings will demonstrate that the novel, like Borden, is marked by an intermediate stance: Critically, yet productively, it renegotiates acceleration as a value, imperative and marker of Americanness. Distinct literary strategies are employed in *Flamingo* for the purpose of moving the overarching discourse of acceleration into a critical light and of formulating a productive alternative to the American ethos of renewal and acceleration. In the first analytical subchapter, I will show that these strategies rely on a mechanism of alternation: *Flamingo* repeatedly calls up the discourse of acceleration in style and rhetoric only to dramatize its subsequent deviation from these. As it alternates between affirmation and critical distancing, *Flamingo* destabilizes the semantic association of acceleration/success and slowness/failure, which had emerged within the overarching discourse of acceleration. Thus, the novel challenges the normative dichotomy of fast and slow. Just as *The Office, Flamingo* ultimately suggests that the ideal lies somewhere in-between these two extremes.

The second subchapter concentrates more specifically on the novel's action-oriented way of responding to the notion that 'American Crusaders' "have not yet found one [scheme] that will work," even if they had themselves and others believe otherwise (Borden, "French Morals" 571). Just as *City Block* and *The Office*, *Flamingo* does not propose that capitalism needs to be overthrown or that a nostalgic retreat from the realities of the modern world will solve the problems of the age. It aims to find practical solutions to make modern life more livable. By examining *Flamingo*'s character construction and plot arrangement, I will elucidate that an alternate ideal of existing 'successfully' in a modern lifeworld is promoted in Borden's novel – an ideal in which the fast and the slow co-exist harmoniously and balance out one another in generative ways.

AN AESTHETIC OF IN-BETWEENNESS: LITERARY MECHANISMS OF UNDERMINING THE DISCOURSE OF ACCELERATION IN STYLE, FORM AND NARRATION

Unlike *City Block* or *The Office*, *Flamingo* does not confront the reader with an epigraph, an illustration or a table of contents that draw attention to the experimental composition of the novel. From the title page, the reader flips directly to "Part I Chapter I" of Borden's novel. Here, she encounters a text that seems to live up to her genre expectations: The text, composed of regular-length paragraphs, appears to be a relatively conventional narrative. An overt first-person narrator introduces the protagonist Peter Campbell and establishes the main setting: metropolitan New York at the beginning of the twentieth century. *Flamingo* in fact differs from *City Block* and *The Office* in that it bears a conventional narrative arc: It tells the story of Peter Campbell, a New York architect, and Frederika Joyce, a British enthusiast of machine modernity who accompanies her husband Victor, a politician, on a business trip to New York. Throughout the first two parts of Borden's novel, the narrative introduces a set of American characters (Peter' mother and wife, his metropolitan acquaintances) who play a part in the development of the romance plot between Peter and Frederika as well as different locales (both rural and metropolitan), where the plot unfolds once the British party reaches American soil in the beginning of part three. In the third and fourth parts, the narrative presents the reader with a complex tale about first encounters with urban America, about life within it, about the ways in which the paths of the British and the American characters intersect and, finally, about Peter and Frederika's final, yet unsuccessful, reunion after decades of separation.

Already on *Flamingo*'s first pages, however, there appear a number of signs that indicate that Borden's novel is not as conventional as it first appears to be: there emerges a subtle lyrical quality in the text, which "ruptures language from the conventions of previous literary generations" (Hutchinson, "Theater of Pain" 143). The reader for instance encounters a tale of human evolution that is compressed into a relatively short, stimulating sequence:

> If there was an eye it could have picked out a small planet turning round and round its sun, obediently, and on this docile spinning speck, something crawling in a confused sort of way: life it was called. [...] It struggled and wriggled, trying to be something, to do something, and it was doing something, under the great watchful eye. By means of incessant clumsy struggling wriggles, slipping and slithering, bumping against obstacles, making innumerable mistakes, it had got itself eyes, too, somehow, and had created out of itself a minute being that it called man. (*Flamingo* 6)

This passage subtly invites the reader to recognize that *Flamingo* is conceived as a novel that, at least partly, responds to the imperative of making modern American letters new and fast. Experimental techniques generate a fast textual *Takt*. Long sequences of alliteration, consonance and repetition as well as an epiphoric construction ('to be something, to do something, and it was doing something') compress stimuli within these sentences. The incessant change from one poetic technique to another occurs so quickly that sometimes, consecutive systems of repetition, alliteration or consonance overlap: The transition between two systems of alliterations ('spinning speck something;' 'crawling confused') in the second line, for instance, intensifies the phonetic *Takt* because a homeoteleuton occurs in the adjoining words of both alliterative systems ('something crawling'). In the last sentence, the consonance of 'struggling wriggles' unites with the onomatopoeic and alliterative use of 'slipping and slithering' to form a multi-component internal rhyme. The dynamism generated by these experiments with textual sequencing is intensified by the tense inflection of verbs of movement, which denote progress and change. The opening of Borden's novel evidently reproduces what just came to be the key denominator of American literary modernism: textual speed. Albeit in a less radical manner than in *The Office*, the lyric elements that appear on *Flamingo*'s first pages mark the novel as modern and American – as an experimental narrative conceived to evoke speed.

Only three pages later, however, the narrative voice establishes the novel's intermediate stance: Taking on a critical tone, it suddenly undermines the heroic tale of "man's struggle to dominate nature," evoked by the experimental style, on the level of content (*Flamingo* 8):

> [T]he sky, pierced by those sharp towers of steel, must split open one day before him and unroll like a scroll, or [...] the gigantic magnetic power of the city's energy must drag down the curtain of the sky on top of it; [...] some day or some night the canopy of heaven, that was straining and shivering with the electricity concentrated and generated in the city's bowels and the row set up in the ether by the thousands of magnetic air-waves set spinning by radio, must give way to a frightful sound of tearing and fall thunderously on the earth. (*Flamingo* 9)

In this run-on sentence, a similar technique as in the opening is employed to create a streamlined *Takt*: Again, patterns of repetition, alliteration and consonance abound, succeeding one another in short intervals. Within this speed narrative, however, the narrator now formulates a warning: unchecked acceleration may pose a considerable threat. The portrayed apocalyptic scene undermines the unequivocal confidence in speed, which is still evoked by the fast style. The narrator begins to break up the semantic association between control and speed: What is expressed in language (style) clashes with what is expressed through it (content). This combination of fast style and critical content appears designed for the purpose of sensitizing readers to the downside of speed.

The way in which the narrative moves from a stylistic performance of speed towards an explicit warning about unchecked acceleration introduces the mechanism of alternation, which is employed in the novel's first and second part to disillusion the reader. The beginning of part two in Borden's novel evidently reproduces a narrative of American speed-pioneering in business and architecture that had already been told and retold with slight variations within the overarching discourse of acceleration (see chapter II.B). The narrative moves back and forth between the fast and slow time-spaces of the story world (England, metropolitan New York, rural Campbelltown), which had "suddenly moved close to each other" (Borden, *Flamingo* 39) when modern technologies of transport had canceled out the spatio-temporal distance between them.[290] Thereby, Borden's narrative contrasts the temporality of these locales as well as their inhabitants. The disillusionment of the reader is not only pursued within each differently focused passage or chapter but (on the macro-level) through the juxtaposition of literary chronotopes as well, as the close reading below will reveal.

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[290] Higonnet identifies a similar strategy in *Forbidden Zone*: "juxtaposing poetry and prose" ("Introduction" x).

At the beginning of part two, an authorial narrator introduces the metropolis from an elevated, distant perspective. This narrative situation evokes the "skyscraper view," which proliferated in the visual culture of the 1920s as a position from which the viewer "dominated the new man-made landscape" below him (Nicholls 111; Nye 96): "Viewed from distance the city was strangely beautiful. The sun shining on its horny spiked helmet gilded the slim towers of its leaping buildings that had once spurted up out of the rock, geysers of stone and steel, and were now erect, petrified in the electric air" (*Flamingo* 128). Just as articles that appeared in general-interest newspapers at the time (see chapter II.B.2), this passage presents the urban landscape as an awe-inspiring vertical panorama that has been erected in remarkable rapidity ('shot up') through innovations in construction material ('stone and steel,' i.e., reinforced concrete and steel-framing). The portrayal highlights the city's beauty; its elegance and stateliness ('horny spiked helmet', 'slender'), putting it literally into a good light ('the sun shining on' it). This metaphorical description suggests that the American metropolis stands stable and unwavering on the foundation of American pioneers' expertise. To support this notion of control and expertise, a "perceptual mode" used by acclaimed modernists such as John Dos Passos, as Cecelia Tichi argues, is employed: The narrator takes on the elevated "outlook by the engineer-by-proxy," who expertly surveys the urban acceleratory system from above (*Shifting* 210).

The succeeding lines in the narrative, however, gradually deconstruct this panorama of speed, control and stability, uncovering its deceptive quality:

> They [the buildings] looked ephemeral in the swimming light. Cutting the azure sharply, ripping holes in the pale canopy of heaven, they nevertheless were frail as phantoms. [T]he city rose up into the air, silent, motionless, as if abandoned; as if it were a shell, empty; or a dream, substanceless. Gazing, one was convinced that some superhuman agency had been at work here. (*Flamingo* 128–29)

The splendid panorama of speed, stability and American expertise is turned into a dim vista of intangibility, heteronomy and peril in this passage. The buildings are incorporeal apparitions that evade scientific analysis and control – even by the American expert, it seems. Brutal and invasive, they penetrate the natural world, posing a vague but very perceptible threat.

Once the narrative 'zooms in' on the vertical panorama further down the page, it repudiates that speed-pioneering could ever put the American people in control of their own fate:

> As you approached, the arrogant profile dissolved and broke up [...] and you heard a muffled roar rumbling in the monster's chest. Unsightly lumps and bumps and scars appeared on its body. It was revealed wallowing a rubbish heap [...] plastered all over [...] with the most terrible tawdry trimmings, trinkets, brooches and belt-buckles of cardboard

> and iron and tin, that bore huge letterings and pictures, some in glaring colors. The truth was that the place was in a turmoil of disorder. (*Flamingo* 129)[291]

Words from the semantic field of destruction ('dissolve,' 'break up,' 'scar,' 'rubbish,' 'turmoil,' 'disorder'), coupled with images of an uncontrollable, materializing threat ('roar,' 'monster,' 'terrible'), establish that the metropolis is in decay. Such a description evokes a nostalgic idea of a more intact and slower pre-modern city.[292] Remarkably, this apocalyptic portrayal is presented to the reader in a passage that is, stylistically, compatible with the current ideal of textual speed: Reproducing the technique of "quick concentrations" in "sound modules," which Kenneth Burke identifies in Marianne Moore's poetry ("Motives" 100), incessant staccato alliterations, homeoteleuton and rhymes are used to relate the intensity of sensory stimulation in the metropolis at street-level. In combination with the portrayal on the level of content, however, the fast textual *Takt* of the cited passage does not produce a mood of thrill or exaltation but one of negative stress and fearful excitation.

In her 1927 novel, Borden does not adopt the practice that self-appointed American modernists promoted at the time. Instead, she appropriates some of their techniques to undermine the imperative of speed, which these writers frequently took up to consolidate and legitimize their practice. Although Borden's experimental narrative calls it up stylistically, it challenges this very imperative along with the norms and narratives it engendered. The narrative contests that acceleration invariably produces a sense of control, progress and wellbeing and it substantiates this claim by moving acceleration's detrimental effects into the limelight. As in Frank's *City Block*, techniques of textual acceleration are employed for an unusual purpose in *Flamingo*: they do not merely reproduce the thrilling speed of modern life in the metropolis but, combined with a specific content, they draw the reader's attention to the potentially fear-inducing, stressful excitation that has become urban dwellers' reality.[293]

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[291] The passage reads like Frank's account of his return to New York from a trip to Europe, Africa and the Middle East: "I saw no scintillant city rising like an army of arrows toward the Sun [...]. What I saw was a conglomerate of buildings, formless with haphazard shapes, a phalanx of skyscrapers as formidable from the distance as an old comb lacking half its teeth. A sprawling and grimy town [...] – in its disorder, in its dirt, in its noise, in its lack of form and style" ("Savage" 17–18). Both Frank's and Borden's accounts represent negative versions of Walt Whitman's eulogy of New York "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry."

[292] In this instance, *Flamingo* sides with cultural pessimist notions of modernity, as they were expressed – but never published – by Jean Toomer in his story "Drackman," which discloses the notion that skyscrapers are the "greatest buildings man has ever erected, [...] evident to every American," as an ideology and, instead, calls them the "tombstones" of modern civilization (123).

[293] Later, the narrative further subverts the association of agency, control and speed when it presents modern city dwellers as vilified to de-individualized "swarms" of vermin, "tiny black moving specks" that resemble "flea," "bees or ants." The narrator describes the process of urbanization as a development that enlarges, strengthens and nourishes the agency of "machines a thousandfold more powerful than men:" "the great towers climbed higher and higher, [...] broke away from" human beings and, eventually, "became something greater than they had dreamed" – an autonomous "monster, alive with energy [...] a million times greater" than mankind's. Passive constructions suggest that men and women lose their agency to machines and the city: The former "are shot up through vertical tubes [...]; elevated railways [...] whirl them through the air, or [they] are shot down again into the bowels of the earth" (130).

There is another structural-stylistic mechanism in *Flamingo* which reveals that Borden, too, independently opted for an aesthetic of in-betweenness to affect modern readers: As in *The Office*, 'fast' and 'slow' textual forms are directly juxtaposed in *Flamingo* to sensitize the reader to the downside of ubiquitous acceleration as well as to the positivity of 'the slow and old.' While the reader is confronted with only one, yet extremely dramatic juxtaposition of this sort in *The Office*, a constant alternation between 'fast' and 'slow' literary chronotopes is used in *Flamingo* to generate this effect in a less invasive, yet equally effective manner. As I have shown, *Flamingo*'s rendering of the metropolis breaks up the semantic association of speed and control – and it does so every time it focuses on the metropolis. The 'slow' renderings of decelerated places build up their line of attack from the opposite direction: They reaccredit 'the slow and old' with value, arguing that they need to be preserved in the modern world. As Amy Moorman Robbins points out in a different context, such hybrid forms of writing have the potential to "bring[] to the surface competing ideologies and their implications for lived experience" (2). The way in which 'fast' and 'slow' passages alternate in *Flamingo* affects just that. It reveals that the missing elements in 'new and fast' spaces (human agency, predictability and stability) can still be found in old, decelerated places.

The portrayals of England and Campbelltown in *Flamingo* are essentially sympathetic: The narrator introduces London as the "human" as well as "heavy, lazy and comfortable" capital of a "wonderful old world of great traditions, great houses, great names" (422). Such an old, decelerated world has an intergenerational stability because, the narrator suggests, individuals root their identity in and adapt their everyday actions to long-established patterns of class and morality: "England has a long memory," comments the narrator, and details the attitudes, practices and routines that Victor Joyce, an English politician, has "inherited" from his ancestors (51). The diction used in *Flamingo* establishes that this very permanence stabilizes Victor's existence and gives him agency and predictability: Victor is renowned for his "uncompromising rectitude," which makes him, in his home country, a figure that "loomed large, solid, immaculate and imperturbable" (51).

Campbelltown, the American counterpart to England, is introduced as an equally decelerated place, where social and spatial relations have an intergenerational duration. Throughout, the narrator's sympathies lie with this village as well as with the characters who inhabit it: "I would like to stay with Amanda Campbell [Peter's mother] in Campbelltown," confesses the narrator, "with the scarlet leaves of the maple-trees showing outside the windows [...] [but] I cannot stay [...]; New York is calling" (*Flamingo* 273). A nostalgic stylization of Campbelltown as a village that exists in symbiosis with the surrounding natural world appears in the following passage:

> The main street of the town ran parallel to the lake. Half a mile up, away, that is, from the shops, the post office and the ramshackle Mansion House Hotel, with its long verandah and rows of rocking-chairs, at the bottom of the hill where the Campbell house stood, there was a sunny opening above the bridge over the river which flowed down the valley from the lake to join the Hudson a hundred miles away. The Indians had used the river for trade [...], and the young people of Campbelltown still used the same kind of canoe [...], there was a sound of young voices calling, the tinkling of mandolins. (*Flamingo* 213)

This 'slow' passage generates a detailed and stable rather than economized and fleeting sense of place: Gradually, this literary chronotope establishes spatio-temporal relations between several objects (houses, canoes) and individuals – relations that are marked by their durability and stability. The narrative mode of literary realism and a nostalgic tone create a positive counter-pole to the 'fast' disorder, fleetingness and human misery evoked by the metropolitan chronotopes in *Flamingo*. In the rural chronotope, "an inherent sense of order [...] [and a] relative confidence in the mimetic properties of language and the stability of perspective" exists (Donovan 11). In a nostalgic tone, the narrator describes a world of ontological stability and tradition, where locales are steeped in history and objects (verandahs, rocking-chairs) are built from naturally grown material by manually working craftsmen.[294] The diction employed here emphasizes the positive ontological stability that characterizes (an existence in) decelerated time-spaces in contrast to what Paul Virilio calls the "end of duration [and uniqueness] in favor of instantaneousness" and "universality," which dominate hyper-accelerated environments also in *Flamingo*'s portrayal (Virilio qtd. in Redhead 53). Both fast and slow chronotopes oppose the vogue of abolishing 'the old and slow' in Borden's novel.

The positive effects of slowness on individual and social life, indeed, come into relief in slow renderings of rural places. The people of Campbelltown are introduced in their relation to nature, to each other and to their own past, including their Native Americans predecessors. In Campbelltown, a collective history is alive in names, objects and practices.[295] Religious and natural rhythms regulate and synchronize communal life in Campbelltown, providing durable and stable points of reference (morality, charity, etc.) for the inhabitants which are "not in the least vague" (*Flamingo* 212). Social relations here have a similarly permanent quality: The "trust," dependency and "respect" between Campbelltowners has grown as slowly as their identity, which is made up of *Erfahrungen* that are "inseparable, incommunicable, untransferable" from each individual (*Flamingo* 212, 28, 262, cf. 26, 215-16, 219). Even though the narrator never lapses into an anti-modernist rhetoric, the portrayal of Campbelltown accentuates the positive aspects of old, slow places and lifestyles.[296] A strong focus on the correlation of slowness, morality and stability dominates the narrative. In contrast to the metropolis, Campbelltown is still a "pleasant place to live in," states *Flamingo*'s narrator (219).

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[294] At the time, the technical improvements in industrial production inspired many to criticize the worker's loss of skill and self-determination in the process of production. Veblen, for instance, commented in 1914 that "[t]he share of the operative workman in the machine industry is (typically) that of an attendant, an assistant whose duty it is to keep pace with the machine process and to help out [...]. [T]he machine process makes use of the workman. [...] Perfection in the machine technology is attained in the degree in which the given process can dispense with material labour; whereas perfection in the handicraft system means perfection of manual workmanship. [...] This demands a degree of intelligence, and much of this work calls for a good deal of special training" (*Instinct* 306–07).

[295] The narrator mentions that George II financially supported the pioneer Campbell and eight generations of the family have since lived in the village. The families trace their heritage back to the English gentry (*Flamingo* 26).

The following passage illustrates how mechanisms on the levels of style, perspective and diction are interlocked in a rendering of another slow chronotope, a British country house, to accredit new value to slowness:

> [Victor] was fifty-six years old and she [his wife Frederika] was forty. They had both, he felt, settled down very comfortably. And, as a diversion from his duties, he had little hobbies. He collected, for instance, china dogs. He had a cabinet full of them in the corner of his bedroom [...]. It was a cold, neat room with the window always wide open even on cold winter days. The fog drifting in soaked into the large sponge, the toothbrushes, hairbrushes, shaving-brushes, the towels, the blankets. [...] The room was just as he liked it, and every now and then he shyly added a new china dog to the collection in the cabinet. (69)

This passage provides a straight-forward account of Victor's habits, his habitation and his practices. Simple grammatical structures and a clear declarative tone convey a sense of control and ontological stability. Temporal markers and the practices they describe ('settle down,' 'collect,' 'always wide open,' 'every now and then') impart the impression of a durable and stable existence.[297] The desirable ontological quality of decelerated states – and decelerated styles – is thereby underlined. In this manner, the narrative challenges the notion that modern writing in America needs to find exclusively new aesthetic means to account for twentieth-century realities. In addition, it revalidates decelerated forms of narration as a means of providing the narrative voice with an agency to elaborate on the facts of existence and map out the room Victor inhabits.[298] A stabilizing and reassuring quality is attributed to realist modes of storytelling, even if (or exactly because) they run counter to the modern imperative of textual speed.

Both critical 'fast' passages that undermine the positive associations of (textual) speed and 'decelerated' episodes that reaccredit slowness with value in *Flamingo* refute that speed is an exclusively positive quality and slowness a flaw to be eliminated. In fact, exactly those elements which are at stake in fast spaces (ontological stability, control, history and identity) are portrayed as the essence of slow places. The formal mechanism of juxtaposing 'fast' and 'slow' styles, which is used in *The Office* at the transition to the novel's second section as well as to defamiliarize readers, represents a crucial mechanism through which Borden's novel generates a critical impact. The alternation between the critical metropolitan chronotope and the nostalgic rural chronotope repeatedly subjects the reader to an experience of defamiliarization, provoking her to reflect anew on the positive and negative implications of 'the fast' and 'the slow.' It furthermore invites her to challenge common narratives of speed and success. Every time the narrative turns from 'fast' to 'slow' passages and back again, it prompts the reader to reflect upon both temporalities. Just as *City Block* and *The Office*, *Flamingo* does not invite the reader to indulge in the "spectacle" of a fast modern read, which for instance Moore favored ("Hymen" 80). Instead, it provokes its readers to approach the phenomenon of acceleration in a critical, yet generative manner and to reconsider the positive implications of slowness. A re-consideration of *Flamingo*'s stylistic heterogeneity through the lens of temporality elucidates that the novel's alleged 'lack' of unity in fact represents an essential feature that equips Borden's novel with the potential to affect the reader.

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[296] Here and elsewhere, the narrator is critical of anti-modern isolationism. The "old people of Campbelltown, who looked askance at New York [...], from the leafy bowers of their shady verandahs, with contempt and aversion" are contrasted with the more progressive and open attitude of Peter's mother. Victor's anti-modernist hate of and opposition to change in the social and military realm is contrasted with Frederika's vision of the emancipated modern woman (see below) (*Flamingo* 217). See Borden's critique of "The Englishman Himself," whom she considers to be "incorrigible and undefeatable" notwithstanding his commendable social nature since he will "fight and curse any government that attacks his wealth or his privileges" in his "fear of change" (455).

[297] In one instance, the narrator even notes that "Victor was certainly not wondering [...]. He knew" (18).

[298] For a similar description of a private house in Campbelltown, see for instance page 213.

In the first and second parts of *Flamingo*, a hybrid aesthetic is employed to sensitize the reader to the detrimental effects of acceleration. In its third and fourth parts, it negotiates the phenomenon of acceleration in nuanced and action-oriented ways. It explores alternative lifestyles and coping mechanisms that could make modernity more livable for the individual, animating the reader to consider these as well. In this respect, *Flamingo* resembles *City Block* and *The Office*: It is designed to disillusion, to promote alternatives and to animate.

At the beginning of part three, when the party from England arrives in New York, a remarkable metafictional feat serves to alert even the least perceptive reader to the problematic dimensions of speed-up: The narrator suddenly comments on the impact that a higher rate of events in the metropolitan story world has on the process of narration.

> From now on this story becomes very confused. It is going to be very difficult to keep track of these people once the *Aquitania* [the ocean line on which Victor and Frederica travel to America] is tied up to the Cunard pier in the West river. It is going to be like a game of hide-and-seek, a sort of treasure-hunt on switchbacks, in a crowd, in the dark that jangels and jiggles, in a great confusion of noises; and it will be impossible to keep my eye on the clock and tell a straight narrative of how one thing happened after another, for it wasn't like that. All sorts of things happened at once [...]. (272)

As this meta-commentary illustrates, Borden refuses to adopt the techniques used by acclaimed modernists such as Dos Passos, who was celebrated by Sinclair Lewis in 1925 for "omitting the tedious [narrative] transitions" (69) in his evocation of urban America. The narrator in Borden's novel openly addresses the transition to a new phase in the narrative and he discusses the challenge of transforming an urban scenario, in which the amount of events that take place per unit of time increases dramatically, into a coherent narrative. *Flamingo*'s narrator halts the progression of the story to engage in an extended, self-reflexive process of meaning-making.[299] Instead of presenting the reader with a 'prose-machine,' which seems to master such a challenge by fabricating a fast-paced, terse chronicle of events as they unravel, the narrative demonstrates that momentary deceleration is indispensable if one wishes to transmit some sense of meaning, control and critical awareness through an account of these events. "Helpless? Of course they were helpless. I know that [...] – what has that got to do with it? Or rather, isn't that just the point," asks the narrator, promoting momentary deceleration as a coping strategy to counteract such a state (*Flamingo* 281). The narrator's intervention refutes the notion that "triumph[s] of tempo and terseness" invariably represent instances of control, as author-engineers, film pioneers and city planners proclaimed in unison at the time (Moore, "It Is not Forbidden" 335). Just as "Harry Widener" in *The Office*, *Flamingo* emphasizes the generative value of slow mental processes such as (critical) reflection and introspection.

Even if John Eckman has reason to write that "the city not only overwhelms the characters who confront it but the narrative itself" (165), it is important to note that this state only persists for a brief moment – and this very moment has an important symbolic function in Borden's novel. It provides the occasion for a revalidation of slow modes of storytelling in an age of acceleration. Whereas contemporary critics praised Dos Passos because he "leaves out the writing in between" and finishes his novels "without explicit comment" (E. Wilson, "[Rev. of *The 42nd Parallel*]" 85) and Williams stated that there is "not time enough in modern verse to be prolix" (qtd. in Welshimer Wagner 75), Borden rehabilitated 'slow' forms of narrative mediation. Thereby, she demonstrated that they are helpful to manage modern narratives when, for instance, technologies of transport and communication complicate the story and unfold it at an accelerated pace.[300] Emancipating himself from the regime of speed, Borden's narrator employs mechanisms of slowly (retroactively) managing the acceleration of the unfolding story to sustain the communicability of the plot: "One hesitates, feels bewildered, lost – where was I? Ah, yes, the Victor Joyces are about to land in New York" (*Flamingo* 283). After this moment of reorientation, *Flamingo*'s narrator slowly and persistently reclaims control over the fast-evolving story: "This was on Monday, the day that Mrs. Jamieson [Peter's mother in law] called up Adelaide [her daughter] in Washington," he explains and continues to broaden the complex entanglements: "and just after Biddy [Frederika's friend] had talked to Frederika; for the telephone has just stepped in and was taking an active part [...], bringing the scattered characters perilously close to each other, and yet dividing them" (367; cf. 375).[301] Compared to Asch's rendering of speedy tele-communication in "The Voice," this description appears excessive in length, detail and narrative mediation. Borden's narrator uses lengthily descriptions to keep the temporal relations between different strands of the multi-layered storyline in check (cf. 344-45, 372-73, 375). In other instances, he moves back and forth between plotlines that unfold simultaneously in distant spaces or uses temporal points of anchorage (e.g., a thunder storm that hits New York) to relate different characters' actions in time (cf. 290-295, 360-373). Central scenes, for instance Peter and Frederika's encounter in a Harlem night club, are re-narrated from three different perspectives on three different occasions (cf. 279, 402, 412-13). Focalization, too, contributes to a well-managed unfolding of the plot in *Flamingo*. A remarkably large proportion of the narrative in parts three and four is focalized through Victor's assistant Perky and stays relatively 'unmarked' in style for reasons outlined below. At the end of the novel, the narrator summarizes the facts and rumors about each character in a resolute tone and finally zooms out until "[y]ou and I can't hear Gussy sobbing her heart out [...]. We can't see Amanda Campbell sitting with Chris [Peter's brother] in her shabby room." What remains is "the roar of the wind and the sea, and that other breathless sound of life rushing on [...], a great clock ticking out the seconds" (*Flamingo* 474).

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[299] In this respect, *Flamingo* resembles Sherwood Anderson's narratives, in which an "intrusive narrator [...] may suddenly protest that he is hopelessly puzzled by life or, contrariwise, may make large, confident assertions about the especial loneliness of Americans" (Rideout 2).

[300] In her 1930 essay on the "English Climate," Borden similarly addresses the negative influence of speed on narration: "But I am going too fast. I am rushing ahead with my argument before laying down my premise" (30).

At a historical moment in US-American history, when everyone and everything was driven to ever greater time-economy within the overarching discourse of acceleration and deceleration was decried as an atavistic brake on progress, Borden refused to discard all remainders of 'the old,' willingly taking the risk of being attacked for such a counter-discursive act. This very act registers in *Flamingo*'s design. Fast and slow chronotopes are juxtaposed within it for the purpose of bringing the positive and negative implications of 'the fast' and 'the slow' into relief, respectively. Thereby, its readers are potentially encouraged to challenge the normative dichotomies (fast/good/American vs. slow/negative/un-American) and to recognize the benefits of combining 'the fast' and 'the slow' in productive ways. Implicitly, Borden's novel validates its own aesthetic of in-betweenness as one that successfully realizes the ideal of intermediacy on the level of style to meet the (temporal) challenges of the twentieth century. In what follows, this chapter will unearth how such a productive combination is promoted as an alternate model of modern living on the level of content as well.

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[301] "[I]n the middle of a web" of new technologies of acceleration, characters' actions as they "crashed about in it," have consequences "in all sorts of distant places," the narrator notes (*Flamingo* 375). The reviewer Bates underlines the way in which the rate of events accelerates in *Flamingo*: "the wheels begin to turn; they move faster and faster with increasing momentum and we perceive with terror that men and women are being ground up in it [the urban machine]" (909).

SPEEDING UP AND/OR SLOWING DOWN: *FLAMINGO*'S DIAGNOSTIC ATTACK ON UNBROKEN SPEED-UP AND ITS VISION OF IN-BETWEENNESS

In 1928, Mary Borden's article "The American Man: A Very British View of a Very American Situation" confronted readers of the *Spectator*, a British moderate conservative weekly, with a reproduction of the often-heard critique of American life in the modern age, which Borden, just as Frank, encountered in Europe. In the article, Borden writes that 'the' American is "cling[ing] like a leech to the gigantic machine of American industry" within a world which "stands gorgeous and terrible on the horizon of the twentieth century" due to technologies of acceleration, "whose wheels are whirling, whirling, ceaselessly whirling" "with beautiful and cruel precision" (43). Here, the ubiquitous imperative to accelerate affects 'the' American: he is "caught up in the grip of something terrific, monstrous" that turns him into a face- and voiceless "insect" devoid of identity and agency (43). Borden closes her article with a prophesy of doom: The American will be "crushed [...] in the teeth of the machine" (43). Eckman's assessment that *Flamingo* similarly "disintegrates into suicide and resignation" (13) is just as partial as Borden's article would be if it were not satirically broken from the outset: Already the title warns the reader that "The American Man" reproduces an exaggerated and simplified, 'Very British View' of modern American life.

Borden's stance as a cultural intermediary inspired her to bring such alarmist readings of acceleration into dialogue with overly affirmative ones in many of her texts. Positioning herself in-between both extremes, she mediated between alarmist and illusory responses to acceleration in order to assess modern American life in more nuanced and more generative ways. Generally, Borden's intermediate stance as well as her cautiously progressive middle-class moralism[302] prompted her to vindicate the view that "[g]ood style, good form, good manners" "must adapt themselves to the paraphernalia and tempo of life" as they are "no good unless they fit their surroundings" ("Manners" 81, 80, 77). Similar to Asch and Frank, Borden did not categorically reject 'the new and fast' and was reluctant to accept that a modern form of existence should legitimately be classed as 'successful' if it lacks (personal) historicity, self-awareness as well as empathy and emotionality. The previous part of this chapter has revealed that *Flamingo* presents itself as a modern American novel that retains several 'good old/slow' elements and combines these generatively with 'new/fast' ones. The following close readings will elucidate that *Flamingo*'s vision of individual and social life is based on a similar idea of generative intermediacy.

A complex arrangement of character portrayals is used in *Flamingo* to negotiate the problem of fitting 'good manners and social conditions' to a modern lifeworld, in which everyone is constantly driven to accelerate his or her pace of life. Narrative representations of individual and social speed-up are marked by an almost sympathetic mood; a sensitivity to the normative dynamic that city dwellers faced at the time. Simultaneously, they are marked by a critical diagnostic quality: they challenge the normative dichotomy of speed/success and slowness/failure. Three portrayals of 'successfully' synchronized characters (Adelaide, Gussy, Ike) confront readers with a critical diagnosis of accelerated living. Specific coping strategies, which these characters develop to amend the effects of such a life, are negotiated to sensitize readers to the problems and potentials of these strategies. In the portrayal of another set of characters (Frederika and Peter), the alternate vision of modern life comes into view.[303]

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[302] In her article "What is Right – What is Wrong?" Borden recalls how she turned her back on Christian moralism but admits that she has retained a "sense of the moral importance of conduct. [...] I would never be indifferent" (80).

'SUCCESSFULLY' SYNCHRONIZED CHARACTERS

The portrayals of the vaudeville actress Gussy, the New York society woman Adelaide and the director of the Real Estate Investment Bank Corporation Ike Daw put 'successfully' synchronized American types into a critical light. Borden's novel presents diagnoses akin to those submitted by prominent sociologists of speed and writers such as Asch, sensitizing contemporary readers to the problem that high-speed living furthers 'situational' forms of identity, social fragmentation and an alienation from the physical world.

One of the 'successfully' synchronized characters the reader encounters is Gussy Green, a vaudeville dancer whose everyday life is described as "upside-down" and chaotic because her very existence is marked by a "nervous rhythm" that forestalls any kind of durability: Gussy uses intoxicants such as sugar, alcohol, coffee, amusements and noise to create the "necessary stimulus, itch, [and] irritation" that keep her life's pace high at all times (*Flamingo* 323, 324; 323). Anticipating a critical diagnosis of modern life that sociologists such as Hartmut Rosa and Richard Sennett formulate some eighty years later, the characterization of Gussy suggests that a "situational" form of identity emerges when a 'successfully' synchronized individual no longer follows a pre-determined life plan but reacts flexibly to new opportunities, thus eradicating any long-term social or material dependences upon which identity formation relies (Rosa, "Social" 101; cf. Sennett). Borden's portrayal accentuates that Gussy's identity is inextricably entangled with the fast rhythms of obsolescence in mass production and mass entertainment. This allegedly renders her identity unstable and transient as well as devoid of history: To succeed in the race for recognition set up by "that fickle, greedy cruel monster the American public, that always wanted something new" from her, the vaudeville act, Gussy adorns her body with "cheap" mass-commodities, which she purchases constantly and quickly discards again (*Flamingo* 326, 324). Although the narrator recognizes that this persistent self-fashioning enables Gussy to "sell herself to the public, all of her that it wanted" (326), he suggests that it renders her very 'being' insubstantial, artificial and devoid of history: "[S]he jingled like a chandelier," her manner "wasn't quite natural" and the "one trick she could not do well" in her vaudeville act was the sentimental. Everything she touched or imitated [...] became at a given moment funny" (*Flamingo* 324, 324, 326, 326). Since material objects do not become constitutive of her identity on a permanent basis, Gussy appears as insubstantial, commodified and momentarily thrilling as the commodity products she uses to fabricate her situational identity in the first place. Such an existence, the portrayal suggests, makes Gussy unable to play, let alone actually feel, deep, meaningful emotions.

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[303] Although the critique and the vision that *Flamingo* expresses in its character portrayals will be addressed consecutively in this chapter, it is important to note that they evolve simultaneously in the novel and interact with one another in complex ways. To account for this complexity as far as possible, short comments within the readings will indicate how the novel pits critical and visionary aspects against one another in order to implement its generative agenda.

The portrayal of Ike reiterates the diagnosis that 'successfully' synchronized individuals no longer seek identity-producing relationships with material culture.[304] Furthermore, it connects this very diagnosis to the alienation from space, which new technologies of transport and communication produce, in the novel's portrayal. When Rosa defines the phenomenon of 'alienation from space' in 2010, he relates it to the same technologically facilitated practice as Borden does in 1927: communication technologies make the setting of speaker and addressee irrelevant and enable them to "relocat[e] again and again" in ever shorter intervals (Rosa, *Alienation* 84). Ike is introduced as a modern traveler who is constantly on the move and has "no roots anywhere, no fixed dwelling-place" (*Flamingo* 101). The referential frame of Ike's identity does not include a spatial dimension (i.e., places that carry meaning for him) but it represents an immaterial "web" spun by communication technologies, which "revolved round him, contracting, twisting an adjusting itself to cover the globe with himself continually at the middle of it" (*Flamingo* 101).[305] As this description suggests, Ike is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. On the one hand, he is "suspended in the air" because he constantly directs "scurrying" and "hurrying" business transactions via the wireless. On the other hand, his physical location is completely irrelevant to these processes: "His activities were much the same wherever he was. [...] [T]he things described in geography books, never attracted his attention" (*Flamingo* 110, 108, 108, 110). In Borden's critical assessment, Ike's situation is not stylized as a desirable disengagement from physical space. It leaves him a mere "product of the twentieth century" (*Flamingo* 105) – an insubstantial, flexible object without emotional bonds to a (social) place on earth, rather than a human subject whose sense of self is rooted in durable emotional attachments, which he has formed with the social and physical world around him. Two years after Borden's novel, yet less publicly, Toomer identified alienation as an effect of fast living as well. In his unpublished

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[304] "He got no pleasure out of the sense of ownership, and had no feeling or property, whether it were in the form of buildings, land, copper mines or women." In *Flamingo*'s portrayal, this leaves Ike devoid of "feeling" for anyone and anything (102).

[305] Notably, James Oppenheim uses the same imagery in one of his critical articles in *The Seven Arts*: "Blindly we spun a web of machinery around the Earth, of ships and cables, of commerce and art; [...] for selfish enough purposes we built up [...] a new physical body for humanity—the body of the machine" ("Expression [Jan. 1917]" 342).

"American Letter," he writes: "Here is our trouble: [...] We buy and sell. We live in a place for a short time. We move out. We tend not to value things. We are attached to less and less" (141).

The portrayal of Peter's wife Adelaide expands the critical diagnosis of accelerated living in the "new world of abundance-leisure-consumer-pleasure," as Warren I. Susman labels it (112). Borden's narrative not only evokes but critically negotiates the individual and social implications of the practices that Veblen terms "conspicuous consumption" and "conspicuous leisure" in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1899 (23, 34). With the money that their white-collar husbands earn in a modern economy of functional differentiation, the "lovely little bunch of Narcissuses," among which *Flamingo* places Adelaide, race for recognition in the "great competition" of "insatiable" consumption (*Flamingo* 166, 334, 204, 205). As sociologists noted at the time, conspicuous consumption has a dual trajectory: The urban rich have a "love of [outward] display" (Girdner, *Newyorkitis* 21) because a new item of luxury clothes or jewelry bestows praise on the individual consumer when she parades it on the street. At the same time, conspicuous consumption has the 'inward' purpose of satisfying the individual's accustomed rate of experiencing "the attraction of the moment of squandering" (Simmel, *Philosophy* 249): the conspicuous consumer rushes from one immediately satisfying purchase to the next.[306] *Flamingo* addresses both of these dimensions. Adelaide's "insatiable" purchase of luxury products, hence her "fleeting enjoyment of objects" has the 'inward-directed' function to provide pleasure, which Georg Simmel identifies as an essential facet of modern money economy (*Philosophy* 249). Habituated to high-paced consumption, Adelaide constantly searches for sensually intensive leisure entertainments including motorcar races and "talking and singing machines" as well as high-speed amusements such as motor boat trips (*Flamingo* 165).[307] Reiterating the portrayal of "Harry Widener" in Asch's novel, the narrative not only criticizes this practice as egocentric but, aligning Adelaide with Gussy, it furthermore suggests that it gives Adelaide an air of being "not quite real," not "properly made inside:" All she does is play "rôles" (*Flamingo* 163).

Borden's narrative additionally identifies the 'outward-directed' dimension of conspicuous consumption as a source of social fragmentation (i.e., alienation). It suggests that the practice is, in fact, not based on (non-verbal) interaction between people on the street, as Veblen claims (cf. *Theory* 54). It illustrates that consumers require a 'public' in which they can parade their wealth, yet they do not interact with it. Instead, they base their sense of self-worth on their own idea of how they will be perceived during the act of conspicuous consumption: When Adelaide drives down 5th Avenue in her "exquisite shining clothes," she "surveyed" the crowd from "behind the windows of their expensive shining motor" only with evasive "sidelong glances as if [...] looking into a mirror automatically" (*Flamingo* 180). This phrasing emphasizes that (conspicuous) consumption alienates the self-centered consumer even further from others as it deliberately turns 'social' encounters into instances of self-inspection: Adelaide does not engage with the world that unfolds behind the window. She interacts only with (the reflection of) her fabricated self. By positioning herself behind the reflective barrier of the window, Adelaide strengthens her defense against social interaction and deepens her alienation.[308]

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[306] For a more extensive investigation of the nexus of consumption and acceleration, see Rosa and Stephan Lorenz' essay "Schneller kaufen!"

[307] At the time, the winners of boat races were celebrated in general-interest newspapers. See for instance "Miss America Wins Final Speed Contest." Already in 1896, the *New York Times* announced that "two high-speed steam yachts [...] are in process of construction" at Ayres's shipyard at Upper Nyack ("Two High-Speed Yachts" 6).

More generally, the re-negotiation of fast living in *Flamingo* suggests, as does "Gertrude Donovan" in *The Office*, that Adelaide's (and also Gussy's) way of synchronizing her mode of social interaction with the "excitement and continual whirl of gaiety" (*Flamingo* 161) undermines stable social bonds and substitutes them with a short-lived, non-committal and thrill-saturated mode of engagement. Adelaide "has a machine inside her working her," *Flamingo*'s narrator notes; her "little brain darts this way and that way and whirls round and round like a small wheel, while she laughs and chatters, tosses her head, waves her pretty hands, rolls her pretty eyes. Her sweet, high, childish voice rises and falls, tinkling and gurgling and cooing and screaming" (*Flamingo* 163). These descriptions propose that every aspect of Adelaide's being is dominated by the ever-spinning machine of metropolitan funfair culture. Her mode of social interaction produces constant visual and auditory stimulation (movement and sound), which turns her into just another petty attraction for others to enjoy.[309] Borden's novel takes a feminist stance when it thus critiques that synchronization entails a retrogressive process of self-infantilization[310] and self-commodification rather than a 'maturation' toward professionality and self-assurance for New York society women.[311] In addition, it reveals to the reader that a 'successfully' synchronized society woman such as Adelaide, whose whole being is dominated by an urge for thrill, activity and novelty, is unable to establish permanent social bonds. Just as Robert Michelet in *The Office,* Adelaide uses a manner of conversing and interacting that is unfit to establish social bonds; it is based on momentary thrill and enjoyment rather than on time-intensive processes that foster durable and deep relations (sharing personal memories, joint reflection, sympathizing, etc.). By stressing that Adelaide 'takes' her husband Peter only as another object of self-fashioning, which she acquires because "she had taken it into her head that she wanted a[n architect] genius of her own," and by noting that an "endless courtship" is what she "would like best," *Flamingo*'s narrator substantiates this critical diagnosis (161).

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[308] Similarly, Henry James stated in 1906 that this "costly up-town demonstration was a record [...] of individual loneliness" ("Social Notes I" 20).

[309] In 1932, Chicago-School sociologist Paul Goalby Cressey described a similar behavior, "dancing fast and peppy" and "acting peppy," as a "device for interesting patrons" at the taxi-dance hall (99).

[310] James draws up a similar portrayal of modern society in the January 1906 *North American Review*: "We seem at moments to see the incoherence and volatility of childhood," he writes, "its living but in the sense of its hour and in the immediacy of its want" ("Social Notes I" 29).

[311] In a 1932 essay, Borden similarly claims that the American woman's "main craving is variety. [...] Everything round her must change or be changed if she is to feel alive. [...] In her country it means growth. In herself it means the opposite [...], she automatically reacts to the ceaseless pressure, changes houses, friends, husbands [sic!] clothes, religion, and ideas for new ones" ("American Woman" 899).

The characterization of Ike draws attention to a related problem: Once individuals become accustomed to the engineered thrill-rates of the new (media) reality, the social drama of everyday life may cease to affect them emotionally and drive them to substitute speed-entertainment for social interaction. Just as Robert during his conversation with Edith in *The Office*, Ike is bored by "the world of [...] real men and women." Just as Robert, who leaves Edith to dance and sleep with the actress Peaches, Ike only responds to "beautiful voluptuous passionate heroines and dark villains who flickered and jerked before him on the screen." As the reader learns, Ike "enjoyed [these films], for the most part alone, [...] behind the closed doors of his hotel drawing-rooms" (*Flamingo* 104).[312] This portrayal asserts that a 'successful' adaptation to the (temporality of) modern urban America inhibits stable social constellations (i.e., marriage or long-term relationships), which are based on human compassion, interaction and durable bonds. The proclamations that Adelaide is "unhappy in a blind, confused, restless way," that Gussy's "hilarious, crowded solitude" is full of "emptiness" and that Ike finds "no satisfaction, nothing but the poisonous taste of an unbearable frustrated longing" refute that fast living is as desirable as it was portrayed in many other American narratives of the day (162, 334, 376).

The diagnostic portrayal of Adelaide, Gussy and Ike seems designed to draw attention to the downside of acceleration: Their lifestyles differ slightly, yet all of them foster alienation from space, the material world and the social environment. In *Flamingo*'s portrayal, the accelerated lives Adelaide, Gussy and Ike lead defy the label 'successful.' Since Borden had a distinct understanding of the discursive power to which American individuals were subject at the time, however, her portrayal is repeatedly interpolated with unbiased, even understanding comments. It is neither baldly reproachful nor completely affirmative of hyper-accelerated living.[313] Rather, it still recognizes that individuals such as Gussy and Ike, who have been socialized in a world where a rise from rags to riches means speeding up, appropriate forms of acceleration to eke out the negative side effects of their synchronized existences – even if this cannot ever fully balance them. Borden's narrative does not denounce fast living as such. Instead, it condemns that Gussy and Ike find their existence entangled in a discursive constellation, in which constant re-synchronization is the only possibility to get by – and here it diverges from Marxist assessments.

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[312] In *Our America*, Waldo Frank similarly observes that "women who have no time to love seek the stir of a remembered longing in some canned romance" (175).

[313] Notably, however, the narrative does not revoke its critique of the historical "shift in behavior and values away from the Victorian 'production' ethos of work, restraint, and order toward one that embraces leisure, consumption, and self-expression" (Dumenil 57; Susman 112), which it illustrates with Adelaide. It here concurs with Veblen, who scolds such practices as "vicarious" and "'waste[ful]'" because they do not contribute to progress (*Theory* 60).

In a strikingly empathetic tone, the narrator for instance notes that Gussy "didn't fear or resent" the existence she leads in the new (temporal) order: "she merely coped with it; kept on the job, kept herself fit" in order to succeed in the unrelenting "battle for success that never let up." (*Flamingo* 326). "[S]he wasn't much given to thinking about things that couldn't be helped [...] and she was always in high spirits and very matter-of-fact" (*Flamingo* 333). Nonetheless, the narrative problematizes that such an existence does not leave Gussy and Ike with any option to adapt their lives to the new circumstances in a way that preserves old elements and practices, through which they could possibly counteract the negative effects of high-speed living.

Borden's narrative details several ways in which Gussy and Ike use speed-up to regain at least a vague sense of self-empowerment. Gussy is not described as a "product of American distraction factories," as the Marxist Siegfried Kracauer labels the Tiller Girls ("Mass" 75). The high-speed dance performance,[314] which makes her look like "a marionette, worked by an incredibly clever machine" from the outside is identified as an act that gives her a sense of control and agency in *Flamingo*: "She had been getting up to that speed for fifteen years [...], had been teaching her feet to go faster and faster" (325). This sentence indicates that a self-determined mastery of the body is essential in Gussy's thrilling performance. Since Borden's portrayal never lets the downside of such a kind of 'successful' synchronization with metropolitan culture drop out of sight,[315] however, it not only differs from Marxist assessments but from those presented by American modernists such as Moore as well. In one of her essays, Moore for instance celebrated the "technical proficiency" and "invention" through which the Russian prima ballerina Anna Pavlova perfected her "*pizzacati* on tiptoe" as well as her "aerial buoyancy" ("Anna Pavlova" 388, 390, 386, 388).

Borden's novel draws the reader's attention to the problem that Ike's and Gussy's lives are bound up with the dynamic of acceleration, in which "[h]olding to the ground too fast, burdening one's bond with mutually binding commitments, may prove positively harmful" (Bauman 13). The narrator acknowledges Gussy's socially and materially flexible lifestyle as the only practical possibility for a female urbanite to gain a sense of control and stability: "she didn't drift" but "knew perfectly well where she was going and what she was about" while "the earth was unsteady [...] and the panorama of life [seemed] often a blurr" of unrelenting change and hyper-stimulation to many around her (*Flamingo* 329, 325). Unlike alarmist voices of the day, *Flamingo* is as realistic as Simmel, who notes in *The Philosophy of Money* that "[l]oneliness is [...] the positive determination of the individual through negative socialization" in a money economy (299). Borden's narrative does not categorically reproach the constant use of modern communication technology as aiming at a "depraved omnipresence," as Kracauer does in his 1925 essay "Travel and Dance" (70). Instead, it recognizes that radio and telegraphy give a modern businessmen such as Ike the possibility to engage in a form of "ontological re-affirmation" while travelling ("'It's me, I'm here'" (Tomlinson 119)) and to actively re-locate his body in space and time, as the imagery in the following sentence reveals: "[M]any threads [...] he spun from his fingers, *held taut*, [...] in a beautiful elastic web that covered the earth" (*Flamingo* 102, emphasis added).[316]

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[314] Gussy increases both the rate at which she "swiftly chang[es] figures" in her act as well as the frequency at which she revises her technique of speed-dancing the "spinning-top, a whirling wheel, a jumping jack," and other figures until "her feet, legs, and arms [are] going like lightning" (*Flamingo* 325).

[315] In this instance, *Flamingo* possibly criticizes the fact that even progressive women of the day did not fight for the possibility of combining a career and a functional social life: while they applauded women who worked out of necessity, they "made it clear that they did not consider wives' work desirable or normal" (Dumenil 123).

Taking a feminist stance, the narrative even goes so far as to suggest that Gussy's modern lifestyle, especially her rejection to permanently bind herself in marriage and her determination to optimize herself, makes her independent in a historically unprecedented way: "Augusta Green kept herself, she paid her own rent and her own bills, and she had made herself, struggling and fighting and kicking her way to the top" (*Flamingo* 328).[317] In this manner, Borden's novel sets itself against conservative assessments of female independence, as for instance presented by John H. Girdner in his 1901 study *Newyorkitis*, in which he identifies the "delusion that [...] freedom from care and responsibility, are blessings which greatly outweigh the sacred joys of motherhood" "abnormal" (53-54, 55).

As this reading shows, the portrayal of 'successfully' synchronized characters in Borden's novel suggests that neither 'very British' (i.e., alarmist or conservative) nor 'very American' (i.e., partial, enthusiastic) evaluations may productively address the complex ethics of modern life. With *Flamingo*, Borden opts for an intermediate view: the critical portrayal of high-speed living includes comments that acknowledge not only the underlying power-structures that foster these lifestyles. It moreover reveals the strategies that individuals use to regain a sense of self-determination and control. Ultimately, *Flamingo*'s narrator cuts right to the chase of the matter, suggesting that the imperative of acceleration, once is has become a habituality, inhibits modern individuals to adapt to the new surrounding in a 'truly' successful way: He proposes that Ike's practice of substituting thrilling mass-entertainment for social interaction should not be dismissed simply as a "weakness to prefer the screen world to the world of nature" (*Flamingo* 104). The narrator identifies the core of this problematic condition: American moving pictures have turned "the *so-called* real life that roared and rocked and yelled with laughter before its curtain" in the metropolis "into its own image" and has therefore normalized the imperative of unconditional acceleration all over America. The effect is that "life in America" has begun to "imitate quite successfully the [...] life portrayed on screen" (*Flamingo* 104). Such a convergence of 'the real' and 'the mass-cultural' as well as the medial proliferation of metropolitan speed as a new norm, is the underlying problem that *Flamingo*'s narrator identifies. He describes the "reckless way" in which Americans on- and off-screen "threw themselves on and off street cars, the breathless way [in which] they dodged in and out of buildings, and skipped into elevators, the ease with which they pulled revolvers from their hip-pockets, [and] the lightning speed of their motors" (*Flamingo* 104) as the deplorable outcome of a normalization of the speed imperative across all domains of American life. The fundaments of social life (empathy, communication and social/historical awareness) are at stake in such an environment, as this comment underlines. Rather than adopting the illusory optimistic rhetoric that was common within the overarching discourse of acceleration at the time, *Flamingo*'s narrator delineates the pitfalls of the modern American Dream of acceleration: When speeding up becomes the norm, it inhibits individuals to adapt to the new surrounding in a way that enables them to retain the 'old/slow' elements, which are essential to a gratifying existence: social/emotional connectedness as well as a sense of self and self-determination.

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[316] Addressing the present media environment, Thomas Bourry points out that cell phones or the internet work against the inability to locate the body in relation to certain parameters of space and time during flights in supersonic aircrafts (cf. 105, 108-109). John Tomlinson labels this state "telepresence" (111) and Randy Laist reads individual acts of communication as creating a "profile of my selfhood as I exist in the world" (*Technology* 11; cf. 9).

[317] The backdrop for this portrayal is, of course, the great increase of the female employment (for instance in the entertainment and industrial sector), which rose from 20.6 to 25.3 percent between 1900 and 1930 (women over the age of 16), the new female type of the flapper as well as women's rights campaigns since the late nineteenth century (cf. Dumenil 112). For a more comprehensive overview, see Lynn Dumenil's chapter on "The New Woman."

What makes *City Block*, *The Office* and *Flamingo* stand out against both ultra- and anti-modernist assessments of the day is that they confront the reader with a generative form of critique: Although they critically address acceleration in various, they tackle the question of how to adequately adapt good style, form and manners to the modern lifeworld. Each character introduced in *Flamingo* adds another nuance to the vision of a more gratifying life. The British character Frederika, for instance, represents the ideal of modern womanhood, which resonates greatly with the nuanced assessment of modern femininity in 'successfully' synchronized women such as Adelaide and Gussy. At the outset of part three, the narrative stages the arrival of Frederika, the "strong and steady" British woman, in New York (*Flamingo* 18), which confronts her suddenly with the temporal regime of the metropolis, to negotiate the possibilities on offer for her to adapt her 'good style and manners' successfully to this new surrounding.

AN ALTERNATE MODEL OF MODERN FEMININITY: HOW TO ADAPT SUCCESSFULLY

Frederika is introduced as an individual who comes from a family of pioneers,[318] was socialized in 'old and slow' Europe and finds herself caught between two extremes: the social norms of the "antiquated," "deaf" and sleepy England, embodied by her husband Victor (*Flamingo* 36, 34), and an enthusiasm for modern speed-technology.[319] The narrative not only dramatizes the disillusionment of an enthusiast as she encounters the 'reality' of New York, thereby presenting the very effect it ultimately seeks to generate in the reader. By relating emancipation and acceleration, Borden's narrative furthermore substantiates its critique of 'successfully' synchronized performances of femininity and promotes an alternate vision of modern womanhood – a form of intermediacy that combines the best of both worlds and attitudes.

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[318] The narrator explains that Frederika comes from a "sea-going family" and herself dreamed of going to the new British colonies (the New Hebrides) as a child (*Flamingo* 68).

An early scene presents Frederika's enthrallment with machine technology in a way that calls up the American discourse of acceleration both rhetorically and stylistically. The following passage relates Frederika's reaction to the content of *The Engineer* and *The Scientific American*:

> 'waugh-hammer, drifters, drills, clinching lathe, Duty sloper, slotter.' While he [Victor] read, she had screamed with laughter. 'Steam-driven hydro-extractor, centrifugal pumps, vertical steam-driven double-ram pumps. [...] It's poetry. Can't you hear it? [...] Sunderland gear planer, 69 teeth five inch face 3 D.F. cutting time per tooth 30 secs. Isn't it mysterious? Doesn't it convey something extraordinary? It's the new machine world, the way they talk, there, out there.' Had Perky not been there to tell him that it was all a joke he could have taken her to a doctor the next day. (*Flamingo* 70, emphases added)

The passages quoted from the magazines which Frederika shows to Victor in this scene condense information in a functionally economized jargon, which is compressed further in elliptical, declarative phrases that use a rhythmicizing syntax (enumeration) and phonetic patterns (alliteration) to evoke the *Takt* of machine technology. The fast text calls up American narratives of speed and the enthusiasm expressed through such 'narratives' surfaces in Frederika's reaction. The technique of focalization is used as a means to undermine such narratives from within. Focalized through the conservative Victor, the passage accentuates the exaggerated, feverish quality of Frederika's reaction. Although the narrative momentarily takes on this problematic male perspective on so-called 'feminine hysteria' in order to sensitize readers to a rather naïve kind of enthusiasm for modern speed-technology, it soon challenges this very perspective in favor of a more nuanced, intermediate view on the matter.[320] Throughout part one and two, the way Victor pathologizes Frederika's emancipatory interest in modernity and "disciplined and stiffened her" (*Flamingo* 17) is set in a critical light. Notably, this process is presented as a form of deceleration: Since she had come home from lectures or conversations with "painter chaps and scientists and socialists," which "her eyes blazing and her hair looking blown back, untidy, as if she had been running," Frederika "had felt the force [...] like a physical pressure, slowly but insistently wearing down her resistance" until "[h]er face was a mask. He [Victor] liked it to be so" (*Flamingo* 68). Borden's narrative evidently combines a critique of a naïve enthusiasm about modernity with a critique of backward-looking (patriarchal) conservatism. In this manner, it paves the way for a dramatization of Frederika's disillusionment and it prepares the reader for an alternate vision of modern womanhood.

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[319] At one point, potent imagery is used to visualize Victor's conservatism as follows: "One sees him grabbing hold of the belt of the equator, digging his toes into the ground of the past, and opposing his weight to that centrifugal force which keeps the earth spinning on its axis" (*Flamingo* 17).

[320] Although *Flamingo* aims to revolutionize conceptions of femininity, it still uses a language expressive of dualistic gender conceptions to describe Frederika's 'difference:' She is introduced as "a rather masculine woman" (44).

Having arrived in New York, Frederika encounters her utopia of acceleration, embodied in the high rise buildings of New York, from an elevated perspective:

> [O]n her first night in New York. She will stand, motionless, in her hat and coat, staring. Her eyes will open wide like a child's, and a childish smile will part her lips. Her face will change. It will go soft and avid and entranced, and she will say, looking across the dark massed pillars of stone standing in a sea of light that swirls round their bases, [...] that shoots up into the sky like an icile. – 'Look, Victor, look!' (*Flamingo* 286–87)

The narrator directly works a critical commentary into this portrayal of Frederika's first encounter with the panorama of urban speed ('light that swirls round,' 'shoots up into the sky'): He identifies Frederika's reaction, her enthrallment and interjection, as naïve, even 'childish.' In the following, the narrative moves from the dazzling skyscraper view to the disillusioning 'reality' of New York City at street-level, which shatters Frederika's gendered utopia. She has to realize that accelerated lifestyles have not created a crowd of self-confident, cultured women-engineers but one of American "beauties" such as Adelaide, who "chattered and balled, teased and flattered" to provide businessmen with their accustomed degree of stimulation (*Flamingo* 297). By contrasting these women with Frederika, the narrative makes unmistakably clear that forms of synchronized 'femininity' in modern America did neither necessarily strengthen women's role in the American project of acceleration – nor did they improve their social position. 'Acceptable' forms of femininity merely transfer the nineteenth-century ideology of passive and subservient women in the American home into the public sphere. In *Flamingo*'s portrayal, 'the new American woman' is no less submissive and compliant than her historical precursor.[321] She is just an entertaining, "decorative" surface diversion for men to 'consume' at the end of the work day (*Flamingo* 305).[322]

The narrative features several of Frederika's social encounters in New York, each of which demonstrates that the 'essentials' of her selfhood (her manners, self-assurance, maturity) stigmatize her as a decelerated 'other' in the American metropolis, where acceleration is "the sine qua non of social success." In the eyes of American women, Frederika is a disconcertingly "monosyllabic woman who [...] didn't move either her hands, or the features of her face." Pointing to discursive micro-power, the portrayal even reveals that such an aberrant gender performance – Frederika's calm, unagitating dialog and physical tranquility – prompts American women to stage regulative counter-performances: They "replied with an increasing volume of flattery [...], cooing, caressing sing-song" as if they "wanted to give her a lesson in manners" (*Flamingo* 297–98). Borden's narrative here formulates a similar critique as the physician Girdner did in 1901, when he proclaimed that the condition of Newyorkitis "so distort[s] his [or her] estimates of men, and things, and institutions, that they become ludicrous to a healthy subject, or to one less advanced in the disease" (*Newyorkitis* 37–38). Borden's novel refines this diagnosis through its focus on temporality, however, and presents an empathetic but critical reading of American women's 'ludicrosities' to make American readers susceptible to an alternate vision of modern womanhood. Working towards this very ideal, the narrative reveals that Frederika is "interested very much" in the research of a scientist she meets at a dinner, attempted to build a steam engine as a child and is so very confident about herself that she, like Henry Clarke in *The Office*, "didn't bother about" the regulative power that comes her way in New York (*Flamingo* 307, 299).[323] Even if *Flamingo* portrays Gussy as superior to conspicuous consumers such as Adelaide, only the depiction of Frederika moves an alternate ideal of modern womanhood into view: A woman who, like Frederika, "never in her life [simply] laid herself out to please" so she can attain a sense of agency and expertise as well as a new public role (*Flamingo* 299); a woman who has an affirmative, yet nuanced understanding of (the temporal regime of) machine modernity; and a woman who, at the same time, is able to emancipate herself from the imperative of speed so she can generate a stable foundation of *Erfahrung*, identity, history and deep social relations in which to root her existence.[324] Judging from the portrayal of Frederika alone, it is at least thinkable that she will be able to realize this ideal in New York. By introducing the protagonist Peter Campbell, whose story evolves side by side with Frederika's, however, Borden's narrative complicates this prospect and expands its critique while it develops the emerging vision of modern womanhood into an egalitarian model of modern life as well.

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[321] This critique reverberates in Borden's 1933 essay "Man, the Master. An Illusion," in which she critiques that the concomitant "cult of great men" and "of weak women," even if they have "been destroyed by harsh fact," remain largely unchallenged (12).

[322] Albeit less explicitly, Asch makes a similar claim in stories such as "Robert Michelet" and "Some of the Clerks."

RETAINING 'THE OLD AND SLOW' IN THE FACE OF UBIQUITOUS SPEED: RISKS AND CHANCES

Just as Frederika, the New York architect Peter was socialized in a slow place (Campbelltown), where he attained an understanding of what it means to experience stability and control as well as a sense of social connectedness and identity. When beginning his work as an architect, Peter was "whirled away [...] on the great grinding roaring torrent of American life" in the metropolis (*Flamingo* 27). Since Peter is repeatedly identified as an enthusiast of modernity, he appears as an individual who is predisposed to actualize the alternate ideal: to take an intermediate stance in which he combines a moderate form of modernist enthusiasm with a mindful, generative dedication to 'the old and slow.' By dramatizing Peter's existence in the force-field of the discourse of acceleration, however, *Flamingo* elucidates the problems that confront individuals who seek to retain desirable elements of 'the old and slow' in a metropolitan environment where speed is the ultimate imperative.

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[323] In one of her essays, Borden finds more direct words: Women "who chose to ignore decency for the sake of sensation have become idiotically stupid and increasingly vulgar without being for a single moment aware of it." "Coquette [...] is not a term of opprobrium in America. Yet she is [...] cruel and silly, greedy and stingy and essentially unnatural, and she cares for no one on earth but herself" ("French Morals" 568).

[324] In these respects, Borden's novel presents an ideal of the modern woman that resembled the one favored by the members of 'Heterodoxy,' a feminist club established in 1912 by Marie Jenney Howe and based in Greenwich Village, who defined the ideal "woman of the future" as "big spirited, intellectually alert, [and] devoid of the old 'femininity'" (Elizabeth Gurley Flynn qtd. in Schwarz 1).

Borden's narrative establishes Peter as an individual who is generally optimistic about American modernization yet torn apart by diametrically opposed forces which he is unable to reconcile: The imperative of acceleration, which determines his every action, and the values and habits that have been engrained in him through his upbringing. The latter still inform his sense that unrestricted acceleration deprives his life of its essence (i.e., emotionality, historicity, social connectedness and self-determination).

> My [Peter's] head is crammed with beautiful clear angles, geometric masses, walls that stream up, stream down, breathless, straining, the architecture of suspense, of aspiration, and of the plumb-line, of precision, of ten-thousand-ton weights weighed on a scale as finely balanced as a chemist's. (*Flamingo* 249)

This utterance by Peter establishes the protagonist's confidence in the modernization of the American city. Not only does it reproduce the rhetoric of acceleration that came to common use at the time to validate speed-up in American architecture (see chapter II.B.2), putting the American architect of soaring buildings that 'stream up' at a 'breathless' pace at his designated place in the scientific avant-garde of American speed-pioneers ('chemist'). With a stylistic evocation of acceleration, the passage additionally expresses Peter's growing enthusiasm as he talks to his mother about his architectural vision: Starting out as a rather inconspicuous enumeration, the utterance features a repetitive structure ('stream up, stream down') and continues as a sequence of short sub-clauses that line up alliterations (unvoiced bilabial plosives [p], unvoiced alveolar plosives [t] and voiced bilabial approximants [w]).

Even though this passage both illustrates and evokes the momentary pleasure Peter feels when his mind begins to whirl in a moment of affectation, many other passages in *Flamingo* reveal that individuals who live through such moments of exaltation may nonetheless suffer from the long-term effects of metropolitan hyper-stimulation. While Eckman is certainly right to speak of an "excitement of modernity" on Peter's part (38), he fails to acknowledge that passages such as the one quoted above are always juxtaposed with passages that bespeak Peter's actual awareness of acceleration's downside; his apprehension that incessant and ubiquitous modernization eradicates the essentials on which the 'good life' he came to know in Campbelltown rests: "He was so in love with this place and so lost in it. He would boast blatantly of the wonders of his city, with a puzzled pained look in his eyes" (*Flamingo* 355). At great length, the narrative brings the detrimental effects of high-speed living – the 'puzzlement' and 'pain' felt by the intermediate individual Peter – into relief in such passages.

Borden's modern city novel features a protagonist who suffers from anxiety and time-pressure because his life is dominated by the metropolitan temporal regime. As everyone and everything seems to accelerate around him, Peter attempts to adjust himself by systematically economizing his daily life: he "divided the swift flying instant of his life into infinitesimally small segments, first by eighty into years, and these by twelve into months, and the nine hundreds and sixtieths by thirty into days, [...] and finally each minute that is a fortieth millionth part of his instant of life into seconds" (*Flamingo* 142). While American businesses were hiring efficiency experts to assign economized operations to even the smallest of time-sequences and American newspapers were celebrating them (see chapter II.B.2), Borden's narrative tuned in with "One of the Clerks" (*The Office*), undermining the common notion that such economization gives them a feeling of self-determination and security: Peter is anything but a self-determined modern hero who controls everything he does:

> although he is chuckling, although there is a reckless, gay, good humour about him, one can see that he is exhausted, that he is making a desperate, scrambling effort. It is almost as if he were pursued, were flying for his life from the city, and as he glances swiftly back over his shoulder, there is a look of apprehension in his eyes. He seems to be afraid of something, someone, but he is not pursued, he is only looking at the station clock. (*Flamingo* 142)

The reader's attention is directed towards the immaterial threat of elapsing time, here embodied by the station clock, which has become a ubiquitous regulatory presence in Peter's life.[325] The portrayal addresses the paradox that an acceleration of life's pace logically leaves individuals with more time at their disposal, yet in fact often indices a feeling of "heavy time pressure" in them (Rosa, "Social" 285). In the novel's portrayal, time pressure determines Peter's every action, slowly wearing him down ('exhausted') and throwing him into an anxious state that threatens to crush this justly 'reckless,' good-natured soul at any minute. Echoing George Miller Beard, who identifies the "perfection of clocks and the invention of watches" as a potentially injurious influence in his famous 1881 study *American Nervousness* (103), *Flamingo*'s narrator reminds the reader about one hundred pages later that Peter feels a "net [...] winding round him [...] as the clock ticked out the minutes" (267).[326] The critical diagnosis is clear: American city dwellers will continue to speed nervously through life, gradually internalizing the feeling of time-pressure and rushing towards exhaustion, as long as temporary deceleration is apprehended as a fatality.

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[325] The notion of regulation also runs through Thorstein Veblen's 1914 comment that "[t]he discipline of the timepiece [the clock] is sufficiently characteristic of the discipline exercised by the machine process at large in modern life [...], as a factor in shaping the habits of thought [...]. He must adapt [also] his movements with skilled exactitude and a cool mechanical insight" (*Instinct* 312–13). In *Perhaps Women*, Sherwood Anderson similarly describes the 'Fordized' assembly plant as "a place of peculiar tension" that "is all a matter of calculation. You feel it when you go in. You feel rigid lines. You feel movement. You feel a strange tension in the air. There is a quiet terrible intensity. The belt moves" (19, 27).

[326] The synchronization of people's movements with the clock became a common trope of modern life in American film as well, for instance in Griffith's *The Lonedale Operator* (1911) (cf. Gunning, "Systematizing" 26) or in Paul Fejos' film

The narrative does not blame Peter for being enthusiastic about American (architectural) modernity or for not being as 'successfully' adapted as Ike or Gussy. With the failing romance plot between him and Frederika, it instead dramatizes the negative effects that acceleration may have on social life in the metropolis. The tragic undercurrent in *Flamingo* is that Peter, driven as he is, cannot seem to allow himself to take the time to get together with "the unique solitary friend of his soul," who is not his wife Adelaide but Frederika:[327] "he had no time even to show her his Radio Building. He had no time for anything. So she let it all go" (*Flamingo* 466).[328] In regular intervals, the reader is reminded that the intimacy and stability, which a metropolitan existence is unable to nourish, is exactly what Peter desires – just as Gertrude Donovan in *The Office*. As long as he continues to try to keep up with "the whole machine of his world[, which] runs by clockwork, all its wheels fitting into this rigid little scheme of time, [to which] [...] he and all his brother creatures are obedient," however, Peter will remain unable to overcome his "great loneliness," *Flamingo* suggests in unison with *City Block* and *The Office* (143).

Another crucial factor that both disintegrates the romance plot and challenges, even tears down, one of the pillars of the American discourse of acceleration – the notion that applied science invariably produces control – is Peter's epistemological crisis. With this plot element, the reader's attention is directed towards the downside of accelerated social change, through which an "*increase in the decay-rates of the reliability of experiences and expectations*" occurs (Rosa, *Alienation* 18). When this problematic condition is first addressed in the novel, it is not immediately clear why Peter is "asking himself in an insistent [...] way, sometimes convulsed with merriment over the monstrous joke, sometimes almost sobbing with exasperation" about "the thing, life, [...] the meaning of it" without ever being able to really "grasp" it (143). As the narrative continues and delineates its critical focus, however, it becomes clear that Peter's epistemological crisis is rooted in the speed at which knowledge resources are suddenly overthrown in the modern world. While Henry Ford emphatically reminds the readers of *The Dearborn Independent* that "[g]reat piles of knowledge in the head are not the same as mental activity" (*Ford Ideals* 190), *Flamingo*'s narrator

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Lonesome (1928), where the superimposition of a rapidly turning clock emphasizes not only the synchronized speed of the protagonist's operation of a punch-out mechanism but also the time pressure it produces.

[327] Just as contemporary sociologists, who were "alarm[ed] and bewilder[ed]" by the "social problem[]" of divorce, which occurred in its "most acute forms in our largest American cites" (Burgess, "Growth" 23; cf. Henderson 672–73), *Flamingo* problematizes divorce practices that coincided with heightened rates of social change. Nonetheless, *Flamingo* seems to take a stand for a differently motivated divorce than Borden describes in her 1933 treatise *The Technique of Marriage*: "Divorce should cease to be regarded as a public punishment claimed as a right of redress by an injured party [for instance in cases of adultery]; it should be a privilege granted with great reservations to decent citizens for the sake of ending unhappiness" (231).

[328] Even the novel's title is an indication of their special relation: A screen with a flamingo appears in one of the visions that Peter has about Frederika (cf. *Flamingo* 271).

questions whether Ford's proposition to eliminate quasi-archival knowledge of this kind is really all that desirable: "You couldn't be absolutely sure that the old laws would hold. [...] So you sat [...] not really knowing what you were doing, only guessing, reasoning, supposing" (189). While religion, tradition, society and classical mathematics preserve a relatively stable knowledge repository in England and Campbelltown,[329] the "quicksand of philosophical doubt, constant scientific revision, and relentless technological and social change" of the modern time-space "gives him [Peter] no sense of security" (Singer, *Melodrama* 24; Borden, *Flamingo* 142; cf. Susman 106). Today, researchers of acceleration attribute this feeling to the fact that "[p]reviously supposedly life-long conditions [...] become 'temporalized'," "patterns of action and orientation [in both past and future become] unstable and ephemeral" and subject the individual to "a constant state of disequilibrium" (Rosa, "Social" 82; Tichi 41). Borden's narrative is focalized through Peter's mother to put the problem straight to the reader in a number of rhetorical questions: "The bi, boiling, blustering, bragging world of young America? [...] What sort of standard of morals or taste could that polyglot concourse of uprooted races supply [...]? What indeed was there to guide him [Peter]" (228)?[330] This statement makes a case for reintegrating time-intensive essentials of a 'good life,' such as emotionality, tradition, morals, social connectedness and self-determination, into modern American life to stabilize and 'root' the individuals who live it. This plea is substantiated by the fact that Peter's last chance to attain such a 'good life' is thwarted because he remains dominated by the imperative of speed-up: While "Victor was all on the level, compact between his habits and traditions[,] [Frederika finally has to realize that] [...] Peter [...] seemed likely to crash at any moment." Eventually, she opts for stability and predictability and returns to England. Here, she feels, she can at least exist as "a separate independent being" (*Flamingo* 466) instead of being pressed to subject every aspect of her being to the speed imperative.

Another indication of *Flamingo*'s intermediate stance is the way in which it interpolates portrayals of psychological impairment in descriptions of the national speed-craze. Thus setting itself against common American portrayals, for instance in slapstick comedies (see chapter II.A.2), Borden's novel illustrates that high-speed living can not only provoke positive excitement but can have more serious and profound effects, too. The narrative zeroes in on the hyper-stimulating environment New York to differentiate the effects of a short-term and a long-term exposure to it: The Englishman Perky

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[329] *Flamingo*'s narrator confesses that he would like to stay in Campbelltown "and work out some clear, definite problem of mathematics whose solution will leave no hurting doubt in mind" (273).

[330] Note that a large library "bound uniformly in fat volumes of green cloth" provides Amanda with a stable epistemic resource. Amanda's printed archive of knowledge holds 'truths' on manners and morality, social criticism, travel writing, (ancient and medieval) history, science and geography as well as essays, novels and poetry (cf. *Flamingo* 214).

> had stared and chuckled and stared again in a growing excitement [at American life] as he did sometimes at the Tivoli in the Strand, hanging on the edge of his chair when Douglas Fairbanks leapt down the shaft of a lift or Harold Lloyd scaled a skyscraper [...]. Indeed this America had been really far too good of its kind, too grand, too unique and awful to be true. [...] If one took it seriously, one would, he felt, die of it, explode like a balloon. (405)

This passage addresses the fact that American moving pictures were commonly applauded for providing the viewer with a thoroughly delightful experience of action-saturated, fast-paced entertainment, partly thanks to Fairbanks' action pictures and Lloyd's slapstick stunts. Abruptly, however, it furthermore addresses the problem that the downside of modern life's 'excitement' is trivialized rather than addressed earnestly and productively by the American public. The last sentence calls up an earlier passage from the novel, where Peter is portrayed as "a country bumpkin whisked out of his log cabin and plumped down into the middle of Coney Island" who "plunged from enthusiasm to despair" when the experience of "hanging on the edge of his seat, running breathlessly from this stunt to that stunt" becomes his daily reality (*Flamingo* 184). This implicit comparison of Perky and Peter makes a literary case in point for two 'conditions' that were commonly related to the new sensual intensity of modern city life: the blasé attitude, as described by Simmel, as well as the often-diagnosed pathology of neurasthenia, "a morbid state of the nervous system," which physicians had written about since the 1880s. Perky's mental "detachment" from the overwhelming metropolis (*Flamingo* 406) is reminiscent of the "blasé" state of mind, a form of "self-preservation" in which the nerves, according to Simmel, become accustomed "to the content and the form of metropolitan life by renouncing the response to them" ("Metropolis" 14). Focalized through Perky, Borden's narrative emphasizes this sort of detachment as follows: "The buildings were too high [...] to be seen properly, so you didn't have to see them properly [...] and when you went up to the Woolworth Building you shot past the floors so rapidly that you couldn't count them [...] so you might as well have stayed at the bottom" (406). Since Perky adopts this blasé state of mind only for the short period of his stay, however, it does not produce "the reduction of the concrete values of life" in him, as Simmel claims it otherwise does (*Philosophy* 256). Just as Frederika, Perky returns to England without any permanent repercussions on his cultural and social rootedness.

The long-term effect of the 'blasé' state of mind is demonstrated in the characterization of Gussy and Ike. The portrayal of Peter meanwhile reiterates the warnings that physicians formulated at the time: As Girdner put it already in 1896, an "over-stimulation and irritation of the brain and nervous system, whether it takes place through the auditory or some other set of nerves, is essentially disease-producing" ("Plague" 298-99). The narrator in *Flamingo* even employs a diagnostic term, when he states that Peter is "suffering from nervous depression" (183), to make it plain that the protagonist is afflicted with a widely diagnosed condition that was popularized as "neurasthenia" at the time. Its various symptoms included, for instance, "an irritable weakness of the nerves," hyperactivity, craving for stimulation, insomnia, anxiety and a "tremor of the eyelids when closed" that was said to indicate "the irritability of an unstable equilibrium" (Angell 364, 367; cf. Gijswijt-Hofstra 2). The New York neurologist and electrotherapist Beard popularized this condition as a "disorder of modernity, caused by the fast pace of life" in America (Gijswijt-Hofstra 1) – and so did *Flamingo* in 1927. The novel's depiction elucidates the symptomatology of neurasthenia in remarkable detail: When Peter closes his eyes at night, he can neither sleep nor escape the "hum and the pulse of the city" which was "working in him [his mind] like a ferment" (*Flamingo* 183, 188; cf. Angell 369; Brown Sinclair 683). At times like these, "pictures formed instantly before his [Peter's] eyes and succeeded each other with breathless rapidity [...]. His closed eyelids became a kind of movie screen [...] and he was bound to look. He couldn't stop the performance" (*Flamingo* 197).[331] This graphic description suggests that the hyper-stimulation of modern entertainment, if it becomes a person's daily reality, may produce something else than a cathartic experience of thrill: The "movie-show" stimulation that Ike uses to counter-act any sense of inertia while travelling becomes a constant assault on the senses, even "a torture" for Peter (*Flamingo* 197).

Stressing once more that negative effects such as these were often tabooed in the American discourse of acceleration, the narrative emphasizes that the doctors Peter consults "had not understood, had merely warned him that drugs were dangerous" (*Flamingo* 197). Since there is no indication that Peter takes any drugs that could cause his symptoms, the narrative here proposes that the medical authorities are either unable or reluctant to recognize that Peter's condition is caused by the unusually high rate of actions and experiences that crowd his daily life. Although such a portrayal is historically inaccurate,[332] it helps Borden's narrative to criticize the deceptive overemphasis on acceleration's positive effects within the overarching discourse as well as the speed imperative as such. The reason is that this very imperative makes individuals such as Peter unable to realize the alternate ideal. Peter remains torn apart in-between two extremes he cannot seem to reconcile: The imperative of acceleration, which determines his every action, and the values and habits that have been engrained in him through his upbringing (emotionality, tradition, social connectedness and self-determination).[333] In *Flamingo*'s logic, the speed-imperative even twists Peter's potential for realizing the ideal of in-betweenness into an inadequacy: Since his background prevents him from adopting a blasé attitude, hindering him to "sin against these [the morals of Christian charity] with an easy conscience" and "telling him that he must above all things be good and true and kind and keep his heart pure" (*Flamingo* 30, 179), he experiences the symptoms of neurasthenia and is pathologized in the metropolis.

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[331] The physician Girdner similarly argued that even if people are accustomed to the "confusing and discordant noises" of the metropolis, there is "no proof that the noises are any less destructive and exhausting to the brain and the nervous system" ("Plague" 297). Philip G. Hubert, Jr. even compared the strain of constant noise in the city to medieval methods of torture (633).

[332] Already in 1880, Beard noted in *American Nervousness* that neurasthenia, "after a period of indifference" has been recognized by "the majority of experts on nervous diseases" (xiii). See Porter for a historical survey of 'diagnosed' forms of nervousness since the mid-seventeenth century.

[333] Consider, for instance, the following two comments from *Flamingo*: "his mind in spite of him was affected by the simple and formidable beliefs of the American church goers. He simply could not sin against these with an easy conscience."

Flamingo, just as *City Block and The Office*, is constructed as a novel that maneuvers the reader into a position where she realizes that a fast pace of life and a fast mental movement, as propagated by Williams (see chapter II.C.1), is necessarily desirable or fruitful. Creating an appeal to challenge this common notion, Borden's narrative contrasts the torturous mental strain Peter experiences with the slower, more generative form of thinking he performs when he retreats to the "refuge" of his office. The latter is stylized as a slow space which is connected to but somehow exists beyond the urban sphere: "suspended in the sky like a balloon attached to the earth by a steel wire, an elevator," it represents a space in which Peter "seemed to be sailing away through space. Sitting at his desk, he looked out into the blue. His windows framed square bits of the heavens" (*Flamingo* 187). Lodged in this distanced, slower space, which calls up *The Office*'s vision of Marc Kranz' position as a poet (see chapter III.B.2), "a flood of light poured into his [Peter's] soul" and he mentally delves into places where the building stock is steeped in history – ancient Greece, Egypt, Italy and India: "he could travel to them and could feel as he sat at his desk their influence penetrating him softly" (*Flamingo* 187, 188). Setting itself against the often-heard claim that "it is 'the crowd, the hum, the shock of men' that sharpens the intellect, develops inventive genius, stirs commercial activity, and arouses the spirit of cooperation" (Rowe 722), Borden's narrative makes a case for this inspirational technique of artistic creation and contrasts it with the efficient, rational planning performed by Peter's "[h]ard-headed, ambitious, skilled" colleagues (*Flamingo* 158) – a fast mode of working that proliferated in America as more and more architectural offices recognized the apparent "need to organize design work according to the principles of scientific management" (Bucci 123). As Henry Ford's architect Albert Kahn urges in his lecture "Putting Architecture on a Business Basis," architectural firms' "practice must necessarily be managed with proper system and on a business basis….There is no place here for the temperamental artist, the clear-headed business man must have charge" (qtd. in Bucci 123).[334]

This chapter has revealed that Borden's 1927 novel challenges narratives and assessments, which had evolved within an overarching discourse of acceleration throughout the preceding

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"He wasn't completely an artist. Something spoiled that for him [...], something in the nature of a still small voice, a whisper, telling him that he must above all things be good and true and kind and keep his heart pure" (30 ,179).

[334] Kahn strove to optimize the efficiency of his offices by employing an elaborate communicational infrastructure and by introducing the routine to graphically chart and collate the estimated with the actual progress per 24-hour interval. In the event of a "marked divergence" that indicates an intolerable degree of inefficiency, "prompt action" was taken (George C. Baldwin qtd. in T. Smith, "Albert" 39; cf. Bucci 11, 127-129).

decades: Just as *City Block* and *The Office*, *Flamingo* undermines the positive association of speed and moves negative effects of acceleration on modern existence back into focus, thereby breaking up the normative dichotomy of fast and slow and legitimizing forms of deceleration. The novel's most remarkable achievement, however, comes into view in its description of Peter's artistic practice. *Flamingo* 'prescribes' a treatment for the ailments of modern American life that lies in-between: the radical "concentration of all possible tonic influence on the nervous system," which Beard favored, and the equally radical isolation of the individual from these influences during a rest cure, which S. Weir Mitchell famously prescribed to his patients (Beard qtd. in Lutz 54, cf. 55). As the anchor stories in Asch's *The Office,* Borden's narrative explores the possibility that momentary deceleration, for instance a retreat to a slow place, may enable the individual to re-root themselves – reconnect to others, the place around them, their history and their selves. A harmonious co-existence of the 'fast/new' and the 'slow/old' is presented as an alternative. By moving in-between fast and slow, Borden's novel proposes, individuals may balance out their lives while still contributing to the nation's progress. A number of places and spaces that qualify as modern retreats are introduced in the novel and pitted against one another. In this manner, the narrative specifies under which conditions they could function most effectively.

Peter, for instance, momentarily retreats to a decelerated mental space to balance the stress he feels when he "hurries through the crowd in the station, [...] [h]is mind whirl[ing] like a smooth-spinning air-wave travelling at an incredible speed" (*Flamingo* 147). When he is on the train, Peter creates a distance between his own consciousness and the fast-paced machine-rhythms at which his body is now hurled through space: "his spirit does spread its wings" and he "drifted into a state that was between sleeping and waking, but quite different from either. [...] Another kind of space surrounded him" in which "his memory [...] recreated her [Frederika] for him" (*Flamingo* 147). Joseph Anthony argues that such passages in *Flamingo* illustrate Peter and Frederika's "mystical" relation (634). But read through the lens of temporality, it becomes evident that they introduce a form of mental re-balancing, which neutralizes the "overpowering confusion" that Peter has felt just a moment before (*Flamingo* 147). Mental re-balancing stabilizes Peter time and again because it re-roots him in experiences to which he ascribes great significance: He is able to re-live these *Erfahrungen* because, the portrayal suggests, he had taken the time to "listen[] and memorize[]" Frederika with all of his senses during the original encounter: "the *long* slits of the black eyes, the *broad* cheek bones. The little pearls in the tips of her ears [that] had *glinted*," the tone of her "*low*, *husky* voice, the *short*, slightly *hoarse* periods, the *terse* emphasis," the "*rustle* of her clothes as she *brushed* past him, and [...] the *scent* that she disengaged" (*Flamingo* 151, 150, 151, 193, emphases added). By suggesting that Peter's mental re-balancing "relaxed" him, roots his identity in past *Erlebnisse* and lets him escape the fleeting, unreal "camera-film" of modern life (*Flamingo* 149),[335] the portrayal anticipates more recent analyses, which argue that "daydreaming may become an intensified reaction to the preachings about order, rationality, and efficiency in modern life" – they "serve as an escape from reality, but they also make it feasible to survive in everyday life" (Ehn/Löfgren 209, 215).

Borden's narrative makes unmistakably clear that such a form of mental coping can only be practiced by individuals who have been able to obtain a repository of *Erfahrungen* in the first place – those who have "memory [...] saturated with [...] personality."[336] It thereby disqualifies the "great gay monstrous panorama of American life that had seemed to unfold and fly past before his [in this case Perky's] eyes like a super-film" as an environment where individuals can attain such a repository (*Flamingo* 149, 405). In this respect, Borden presents a similar diagnosis as Walter Benjamin, who explains in one of his essays that the "greater the shock factor in particular impressions [in street or medial scenarios], the more vigilant consciousness has to be in screening stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less these impressions enter long experience [*Erfahrung*] and the more they correspond to the concept of isolated experience [*Erlebnis*]" ("On Some Motifs" 319). The generative agenda of Borden's portrayal comes into view in the fact that it presents a feasible remedy for the problem it addresses: modern individuals can adapt their life to the temporal 'reality' by frequenting slow spaces, where they engage in the inefficient, yet generative mental operations (reflection, processing) that transmute *Erlebnisse* into a repository of *Erfahrung* – a repository in which they can momentarily re-root their existence when speed threatens to overwhelm them.

Just as *The Office, Flamingo* presents real-world 'other places' as "refuges" from the metropolitan temporal regime (*Flamingo* 206) – as spatially remote heterotopias of compensation. In *Flamingo*, most of them, except Campbelltown, are not oases of deceleration that still resist the proliferating imperative of speed-up in modern America. They fall into Rosa's category of ideological, hence oppositional forms of deceleration (cf. *Alienation* 37) because individuals deliberately establish them as 'other places,' in which they momentarily escape the deleterious speed regime as well as re-construct social bonds, regain a sense of agency and re-root their existence in history and *Erfahrung*.

One of these spaces – a Harlem jazz club – is located within the urban landscape: it is a "subterranean Africa blazing under the city's pavement," which Peter personally finances (*Flamingo* 25). When he is again tortured by the symptoms of neurasthenia, Peter finds relief in this Harlem jazz club. As common in experimental prose of the day,[337] the temporality of jazz is expressed stylistically in Borden's novel (cf. Oja 59): The text is marked by onomatopoeic, orthographic and repetitive patterns that evoke the *Takt* of modern life, which jazz is commonly said to reproduce (cf. Rosa, "Vorspann" 10).

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[335] Notably, Peter tries to decelerate and substitute the "meaningless" fragments that "pass ceaselessly" in his mind with "a monotone," controlled and meaningful "chant" of mathematical definitions (*Flamingo* 198).

[336] Writers in *Seven Arts* also noted that "WHEN the pressure of a great hour comes upon us, we may draw strength from one source only" – from "the very depths of ourselves. Those depths are the Past" ("American" 555).

> Jiggity a jig jiga jig bang. Jig a jig, jiggity jig, jiggity jiggity jiggity jig boom. Parrots were squeaking in the trees and monkeys chattering, and the depraved, the sophistic*ated*, the compli*cated* syncop*ated* tom-tom was *beating* wildly, was *beating* softly, and the gorillas were s*haking*, *shaking*, on their huge feet, their great arms jerk*ing*. (*Flamingo* 209)[338]

The passages that map out the heterotopia of the jazz club, however, stylize both jazz musicians and the audience as engaged in practices that only materialize in the "liminoid" domain of the arts and entertainment sector of an industrial society (V. Turner 20):[339] In line with Victor Turner's definition, both the performance and the audience's reception in the 'liminoid' sphere of the jazz club operate beyond the common normative order and assume a subversive potential: they "*play* with the factors of [the dominant] culture," here the temporal order of the metropolis, "ludic[ally]" appropriate and "defamiliarize" it and, thereby, "subtly put[] down the central values" that dominate life within it (V. Turner 40, 28, 27, 41). In Borden's novel, the "genius" jazz musician is equipped with "the greatest creative power on earth" when he playfully transforms the metropolitan *Takt* of machine modernity into "infinitely complex [artistic] rhythms" (*Flamingo* 348, 346, 348).[340] Even dancing becomes an act of self-empowerment. The controlled, synchronized deceleration of this act gives the audience an air of "immense physical power."

> [A] frenzied pulse seemed to be travelling through the rooms – but the crowd [...] danced slowly, languidly, not moving much across the floor, merely letting the rhythm tremble in their knees [...]. There was something impressive about the quiet way they moved through that hot quivering sensual madness. (*Flamingo* 348–49)

The quoted passages open up the prospect to the reader that liminoid practices in heterotopian spaces such as the jazz club not only produce a "changed quality of *time*" (V. Turner 24) or a "strength" that Peter feels as "[i]t surged gently through him" (*Flamingo* 207). Such forms of ludic appropriation may additionally re-root the modern individual in a stable social constellation, which Peter cannot seem to find among his blasé contemporaries: Evocative descriptions project a trans-racial "communitas" (V. Turner 45) into the jazz club, which is tellingly called 'The Crib.' Here, others are "welcoming him [Peter], drawing him kindly into the circle of their barbaric splendor [...], letting the little white man be one of them. 'Law bless you, son, it's a powerful long time'" (*Flamingo* 344). In *Flamingo*'s portrayal, not only traditional manners[341] persist in this heterotopia of compensation but the stable social enclosure (a 'crib') of human compassion and familiarity,[342] created by sociable men and women in this 'other place,' make Peter "like better to be with them than with anyone, [make him] [...] happier" (335). The heterotopia's "*separation* [...] [in] space and time," in fact, frees the "human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity etc., from the normative constraints," as Turner theorizes (24) – and Borden illustrates this on almost 500 pages. The experience of 'communitas' momentarily relieves Peter from his synchronized, yet "scared and lonely" existence (*Flamingo* 198).

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[337] Compare Toomer's descriptions of jazz music in *Cane*: "The flute is a cat that ripples its fur against the deep-purring saxophone. [...] The cat jumps on the piano keyboard. Hi diddle, hi diddle" (104).

[338] This passage is the only one Eckman refers to when he mentions the novel's experimental quality (cf. 137).

[339] While they structurally resemble Foucault's heterotopia, I use Turner's concept to explain *Flamingo*'s conception of the place since it stresses the creative, self-empowering practices individuals turn to in these 'other spaces.' Common liminoid spaces include "bars, pubs, some cafes, social clubs etc." (Benzing 86–89; V. Turner 55).

[340] Borden here attributes a greater transformative power to jazz than Waldo Frank, who describes it as an "art which is part reflection and apology of our chaos, and part rebellion from it" – and art that shows a "recreative will [...] on the substance of American life [...] but the revolt is wistful, it does not master, it is reflective rather than creative." Still, he reveals that such art can bring the recipient "dim dissatisfaction with our world; and by their transfiguring of our disease into a lyric outburst, such arts relieve us" ("Re-Discovery" 129-30, 133).

Borden's novel here clashes with the cultural-pessimist reading of jazz music and dance presented by Kracauer in his critical writings, where he complains that the aim of this 'mechanized' musical form seems to be "a tempo that is concerned with nothing but itself." According to Kracauer, the dance practice commonly inspired by jazz loses any connection to the "realm of the sensuous," becomes effectively deplete of the "eros and spirit" that had enriched older forms of dance (such as the waltz) with a higher sphere of "meaning" ("Travel" 67). They "obviously tend to get worn down to a meaningless shuffle [] [and] are hardly more than rhythmic offerings, temporal experiences" ("Travel" 67). In Kracauer's assessment, dancing to jazz tunes can only ever constitute a "distortion of an increasingly unavailable real existence," an insufficient surrogate, because the modern practice of dancing as such is self-contained and rationalized rather than aiming to the 'beyond' – to the realm of the eternal, infinite and spiritual ("Travel" 72).

Flamingo's portrayal is much more optimistic. It affirms the compensatory potential of ludic appropriations, which jazz and dance represent in this portrayal. It suggests that Jazz rhythms are radiant with historicity, community and cultural specificity. They enable the individual to momentarily re-root his cultural and social identity – even though in Peter's case, this 're-rooting' is vicarious.[343] As it is the case in the portrayal of Clara Jones in "John the Baptist" (*City Block*), an exoticizing portrayal, in which imagery evokes African Americans' bond to nature as well as their collective history, is used to emphasize the relief provided by a lasting connection with the environment and with a collective history at times of acceleration: "The earth seemed to be trembling a little as she [Sal, Peter's female friend] sang, the walls and floor and far distant hills and valleys were jazzing gently. Over the cotton-fields you could hear the wind sighing" (*Flamingo* 350). Even though Peter's 're-rooting' in the jazz club is of a vicarious nature, the place and the *liminoid* practices enacted within it enable him to decelerate his life's pace momentarily and give him relief: he "sank, sank deep, and was at rest" (*Flamingo* 209).[344] Liminoid texts such as *Flamingo,* Turner suggests, commonly "generate and store a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behavior of those in mainstream social or political roles [...] in the direction of radical change" (33). In *Flamingo*, the reader is invited to try out whether similar 'other' places in his own lifeworld could help them to balance out the negative effects of their stressful and alienating lives. As Gussy puts it, "[w]hen you're not working you ought to be happy [...] *playing round* and getting a kick out of something – anything, anything *real*, I mean. [...] [H]e [Peter] knew she was right" (*Flamingo* 338, emphases added).

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[341] The narrator contrasts the formal dress ("correct dinner-jackets"), "elaborately courteous" manners and "rather formal and old-fashioned" words of African American men with the blasé unsociability of white Americans (*Flamingo* 349).

[342] In the literal sense of the word, Sal is called "the mother of all men" in *Flamingo* (208).

[343] Notably no Caucasian appropriation, no "sanitz[ing]" of black jazz culture in "mainstream popular culture" (Dumenil 135) takes place in the jazz club.

Borden's endeavor to chart ways of adapting individual and collective life to the new temporality of modern America without forfeiting the essentials of a gratifying existence finds expression in yet other heterotopias of compensation that are included in *Flamingo*. Unlike the Crib, these are located outside the city limits. Two years after *Flamingo* was published, Borden described the vision she develops in her novel more explicitly in one of her essays:

> Americans will escape from the machines and build themselves human habitations out of reach of skyscrapers, subways, elevateds, and bars. They will build the country just as the English have done. [...] Call it rather adaptation, by the knowing, of the very best that an older country has achieved. [...] [T]he life at a country house will become the center of social life. [...] It will be wider and more magnificent. [...] Airplanes will whirl men for hundreds of miles back and forth from offices in American towns. ("Society" 442)

The most prominent feature of Borden's utopia is the harmonious coexistence of fast and slow spaces. Modern transport facilities bridge the distance that both separates and stabilizes them. They allow individuals to move back and forth between slow places and fast spaces on a daily basis. In striking similarity to *The Office*, *Flamingo*'s vision of 'fitting' good style, manners and form to the twentieth-century reality preserves the positive elements of 'the old and slow' (social structure, identity, historicity and tradition) in a modern, progress-oriented America, which allows decelerated 'other' spaces to co-exist in relative distance from its metropolitan centers of commerce. *Flamingo*, however, does not focus on a suburban sphere that holds the potential of rusticity and is by definition "a peripheral area [...] within metropolitan areas but beyond central city limits" (Teaford ix). Borden's novel favors "oases that have not yet been touched by the dynamics of modernization or acceleration" (Rosa, *Alienation* 35). The portrayal of two houses in rural America goes into detail about the ideal conception and locality of these places. One of these houses is the almost exact replica of Wellowburn, Victor and Frederika's house in Dorsetshire, on Long Island; the other is the Campbell family estate, which was built by Peter's great-great-grandfather in Campbelltown.

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[344] As an interesting backdrop to the positive effect of music on the individual, which *Flamingo* describes here, studies in the *Journal of Sociology* showed that "music may be selected that will excite psychological and concomitant cardio-vascular reactions the effect of which might inhibit irritability, act as a sedative, [and] arouse optimism" since the early teens. Studies revealed that especially unfamiliar music "stimulated" the pulse and velocity of the subjects' blood flow "to increased activity," had a "bracing effect and removed fatigue" (Hyde qtd. in Golston 36). For an overview of studies in rhythm, see Golston.

Frederika's impression that Peter's replica "kept the best of Wellowburn, and where he had been unable to find what he wanted, he had found something better" (*Flamingo* 315) once again expresses the progressive attitude of *Flamingo*. But the descriptions in Borden's novel still assert that Peter's American adaptation of the Georgian house has its very own historicity. It is built and furnished by "special workmen from England," whose manual labor on painted ceilings, paneled walls, the fireplace and curtained windows had "took simply ages" in comparison to the time-efficient construction of New York's vertical landscape. In comparison to skyscrapers, however, Peter's house gains a "spirit and personality" (*Flamingo* 312). Emphasizing the positively decelerated temporality of such heterotopias, the descriptions of Campbell house accentuate the exact same features: paneling, the fireplace, furniture of "old colonial mahagony," family portraits in oval frames as well as an "indefinable charm and a certain severe homely dignity." Just as the replica of Wellowburn, Campbellhouse "was serene and quiet, with a stillness of its own" (*Flamingo* 425).

In the replica of Wellowburn, as one of the guests declares, Peter has "recreated the atmosphere" of the Joyce estate in commuting distance from New York: "it is quite wonderful," the diplomat notes, "I find myself here, [...] one hour's drive from your amazing city of skyscrapers, [...] back in the old world, and in one of its most charming and secluded spots" (*Flamingo* 316). As this comment emphasizes, this heterotopia is not a suburban space on the margin of a metropolitan area. It is completely detached from it. The similar descriptions of both houses are not only significant because in them, the narrator ascribes value to forms of 'the old and slow.' Most notably, he attributes an inherent regenerative quality to these places – they do not require alternate individuals to be turned into heterotopias, as it is the case with the suburban cottages in *The Office* ("Henry Clarke"). In their essence and location, these houses represent heterochronous heterotopias of compensation, where people's – even Peter's – "nervous tension relaxed" automatically when they "escaped to" them. In these "clean, spacious, uncrowded" places, they become "all at once perfectly calm and convinced about everything" (*Flamingo* 319). In both houses, moreover, the novel's social utopia materializes: You hear "the sound of gay voices calling good-morning," couples are "moving lazily round the table in a sleepy one-step," others are slowly "roasting apples or chestnuts" over the fire or engage in social activities such as dancing, hunting, playing games or taking afternoon meals (*Flamingo* 425). The characters even experience "profound emotion," engage in long conversations and are able to make memories by ascribing "special significance" to their actions and reflecting on them afterwards (*Flamingo* 432).[345] In these heterotopias of compensation, modern individuals may not only re-balance their fast-paced everyday lives. They may even build a repository of *Erfahrung* that enables them to exercise mental forms of re-balancing when they return to the metropolis for work on a daily basis.

That Peter and Frederika's paths finally cross in Campbell house and they find the time to foster their relationship through conversation (cf. *Flamingo* 436)[346] is, of course, most noteworthy in a novel about the downside of hyper-accelerated metropolitan life. Equally striking is the fact that Frederika's alternate vision of modern womanhood materializes in Campbell house for the first time. When she talks to Peter about steel structures and engineering, the onlookers not only notice in her that "certain air and elegance" which her American contemporaries lack. They also recognize that she is "softer and more animated than usual" as well as "strong and defiant" (*Flamingo* 438). Notably, it is not in the company of the "champion boxer, the breaker of speed records, or a great financier" (Borden, "Man, the Master" 25) that Frederika can actualize the ideal of the professional, quick-minded, yet well-mannered and graceful modern woman, which the narrative establishes previously. It is with Peter, whom 'successfully' synchronized subjects such as Adelaide call "effeminate," "intermediary" and a man who is "half woman" (*Flamingo* 202).[347] The reader is equally sensitized to the ideal of such an intermediate existence in the portrayal of Frederika and Peter: both characters combine an enthusiasm about modern progress and speed with a critical awareness of its detrimental effects and an appreciation of 'the old and slow.' Thus, their personalities subvert binary gender conceptions that emerge in the metropolis according to *Flamingo* (i.e., the conspicuous consumer versus the businessman).

Even though *Flamingo* presents the jazz club, the replica and Campbell house as heterotopias of compensation, it ultimately problematizes that the generative practice of moving back and forth between fast spaces and these slow places cannot materialize because even momentary deceleration remains a taboo that threatens to throw the individual permanently out of pace in the (story) world. Once the characters leave Campbell house after their one-time weekend trip, the narrator pronounces that all that has materialized there "is of little consequence [...] [because] the city suddenly caught them up in its roaring torrent, and they [again] went whirling off through the frantic jangling streets" towards alienation (*Flamingo* 455). Not only do they never return. The narrator predicts that heterotopias of compensation "could not exist much longer, [...] the world was going to [...] submerge"[348] them under a "tide of life that was forever renewing itself and casting off the old" (90).[349] In an environment where a virtually impenetrable dichotomy of 'new/fast' and 'old/slow' has been consolidated within the overarching discourse of acceleration and individuals internalize the imperative of speed-up, Borden's portrayal suggests that heterotopias are not fully recognized for their compensatory function and they are even prone to extinction – with dramatic consequences. When the Crib closes after a raid, Peter's friends in the jazz crowd are killed or arrested and Frederika returns to England. As a result, Peter resolves that only death can still offer him an alternative – can relieve him from an essentially ungratifying existence of speed, time-pressure and alienation: He flings himself off a skyscraper to go "somewhere where it's quiet" (*Flamingo* 470). As this plot development indicates, the notion that the modern individual is helplessly caught up in an overwhelming dynamic of acceleration is much stronger in *Flamingo* than it is in *City Block* and *The Office*. Even though there runs a strong visionary thread through Borden's novel as well, it provides the reader with even less direct instructions for action and change than Asch's and Frank's novels do. While the latter two present the prospect that a grassroots revolution might occur, led by visionaries such as Marc Kranz or Lotte Rabinowich, *Flamingo* suggests that the dominance of the capitalist system as such, which sustains the speed-imperative, as well as its proliferation needs to be kept in check – or even be mildly reduced – by some larger force before Gussy, Ike and Peter can transform their lives.

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[345] Borden's narrative reinforces the idea that social stability, memory and identity can be created in decelerated places when it describes Peter's relation to his mother, who "was there for him still to contemplate, to depend on, to find relief in, if and when he wanted. [...] He was aware of her as is they were standing shoulder to shoulder" (227).

[346] *Flamingo* here identifies a lack that Toomer addressed in 1930 as well: "The old-fashioned gathering of people around a hearth after dinner, with talk that lasted far into the night, is not present in these modern days" ("Spoken Word" 188).

[347] Adelaide bases this denunciation on her reading of Edward Carpenter's 1908 study *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women*, which had "utterly bewildered" her (*Flamingo* 176).

ALTERNATE WRITERS, ALTERNATE NOVELS

Already two years before the stock market crash suddenly confronted the nation with the instability of what had been deemed a steady path toward prosperity and economic supremacy, the cultural intermediary Mary Borden published a novel that appealed to American readers to face the long-term effects of acceleration. At this point in time, Borden followed an individual impulse that Waldo Frank and Nathan Asch had followed before her: She wrote an experimental prose narrative through which she would be able to convey a critical diagnosis of ubiquitous acceleration and to propose a remedy. She designed her narrative for the purpose of disillusioning, perhaps even mobilizing her readers. Setting themselves against those individuals and those texts who seemed to simply conform within the discourse of acceleration, Asch, Frank and Borden autonomously, yet roughly simultaneously contended that 'the old and slow' should not be played off against 'the new and fast' in normative terms. Only a persistence of the former, each of them argued in and beyond their 1920s' novels, could counteract the ongoing erosion of the social fabric as well as of other stabilizing factors such as religiosity, durable and deep relations with other people as well as a stable identity rooted in tradition, locality and a sense of individual agency.

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[348] Rosa notes that the phenomenon that cultural niches "come under increasing pressure" is common during acceleratory waves ("Social" 94). In *Flamingo*, this comes into view when Adelaide's "efficient housekeeper" intrudes into Campbell house "to clear away" all remnants of history and identity – objects that the visitors are most "taken with" during their visit (*Flamingo* 424).

[349] Campbelltown locals adopt a separatist attitude to prevent this for yet some time: A New York contractor wants to build a hotel on the lakeside but "[t]hey didn't want their town spoilt. They were jealous of outside influence, and resented every newcomer who built a house on the shores of the lake. Indeed, John Prescot and Bill Gilbert had bought up most of the wooded shore to prevent that sort of thing" (219).

As this last case study has elucidated, Borden's cultural intermediacy – her distinct insight into the American discourse of acceleration and her equally deep understanding of acceleration's negative dimensions – led her to confront her readers with a most confounding and complex reassessment of acceleration. To any critic who claims that her writings lack a 'sense of form' or 'basic unity,' as Kronenberger does in his review of *Flamingo* (see chapter III.C.1), Borden self-confidently responds in the preface to *Forbidden Zone*: "To those who find these fragments confused, I would say that they are fragments of a great confusion. Any attempt to reduce them to order would require artifice on my part and would falsify them" (3). As the close readings in this chapter reveal, *Flamingo*'s potentially startling juxtaposition of different styles evokes the simultaneous, yet desynchronized temporalities, which develop when some socio-economic territories rush ahead and others lag behind because they accelerate more slowly – or not at all. While Borden uses stylistic experiments to reproduce the 'confusion' of technological warfare in *Forbidden Zone* – at times thrilling, at time shocking – she does so in *Flamingo* to evoke the temporality of the modern city and to address its epistemologically and ontologically confusing nature (especially for Peter) as well as its potentially injurious effects on individuals (blasé attitude, neurasthenia, loss of self-determination and selfhood). The startling juxtaposition of 'fast' and 'slow' chronotopes in the novel as well as the complex, simultaneous way in which critical and visionary trajectories unfold within it brings positive and negative aspects of different temporalities into distinct relief. In fact, the constant alternation between opposed styles and meanings represents an essential mechanism, through which Borden positioned her novel in-between the extremes of ultimate celebration and outright condemnation. In this intermediate position, Borden's novel realizes its generative agenda, promoting an alternate vision of modern American life in which fast and slow co-exist harmoniously and balance-out one another. Not only *Flamingo*'s 'failure' to be a narrative that lives up to the formal, stylistic and rhetoric criteria that avant-gardist (author-)critics established as canonical at the time, but its actualization of an intermediate stance on all of these three levels, too, exemplifies a deliberate – and notably generative – reaction against the discourse of acceleration in her field and beyond that aimed to further fresh perceptions and kindle activism.

Despite the fact that neither *Flamingo*, nor *City Block* or *The Office*, impacted American life and letters in the way their authors originally hoped, the alternate practice they exemplify deserves more attention than it has yet received. The three case studies that constitute the second part of this study have redirected our attention to three complex and unique, yet forgotten experimental prose narratives of the modern age, which presented American readers in the 1920s with a counter-discursive assessment of acceleration's impact on individual and social life, with an unconventional aesthetic of in-betweenness as well as with a narrative that at least startles or, at best, activates them to take action. These novels neither sided with alarmist or pessimist stances of the day, nor with the illusory, a-political optimism that proliferated within the overarching discourse of acceleration at the time. As the three case studies elucidate, Asch, Frank and Borden favored progress, yet each of them refused to accept that this meant that forms of slowness as well as specific traditional values needed to be eliminated: tradition/history and epistemological/ontological stability, a grown, emotional relation to other individuals and the self, as well as self-determination and a feeling of harmony. An abolishment of modern capitalism and a return to an older and slower ideal was not the aim they pursued. In the literary and non-literary writings by Asch, Borden and Frank, anti-modernist isolationism and outright opposition to progress come under attack in the same way as unthinking and unabated acceleration does.

With *City Block*, *The Office* and *Flamingo*, each of these authors set out to chart unique practical solutions to meet the challenges of the first acceleratory wave: The mystic Frank promoted the idea that a reintegration of a spiritual dimension in people's modern lives would enable them to live more fully within a spiritual 'Whole.' The feminist and cultural intermediary Borden proposed that men and women have to combine their enthusiasm about progress and speed with a critical awareness as well as with an appreciation of the 'old and slow.' Asch meanwhile formulated a general ethical appeal for a re-integration of slowness into peoples' harried lives. Despite the differences that the three case studies establish between these three authors and their experimental novels, the significant correspondences that the close readings single out mark them as examples of an unacknowledged alternate practice of American experimental writing. An aesthetic of in-betweenness that is designed to disillusion readers about the phenomenon of acceleration comes into view in Frank's occasional re-appropriation of fast styles to express psychological/spiritual states in *City Block*. It surfaces in the way Asch lets the first experimental section of *The Office* about Wall Street clash dramatically with the second, stylistically decelerated section, which draws deep-reaching portraits of white collar workers. Finally, it appears in the way fast metropolitan chronotopes alternate with slow rural chronotopes in *Flamingo*. A generative agenda runs through each of these novels. Within the unique stories they tell, they negotiate the phenomenon of acceleration in nuanced and action-oriented ways, exploring viable alternatives and coping mechanisms that could make modern life more gratifying. Furthermore, they feature specific formal, stylistic and narrative mechanisms that are designed to activate readers, inviting her to challenge the universality of the discursive norms and imperatives as well as to try out alternative modes of living that are introduced in the novels.

Even if these writers and their alternate practice confounded actors in avant-gardist and mass-cultural camps in the 1920s, their re-examination in this study has expanded the view to another yet unacknowledged response to the transformations of the modern age, which occurred in the literary field. My re-examination of a widely recognized trend in modern American writing (see chapter II.C) in its historical context has furthermore provided a new perspective on the discursive, reductive consolidation of American literary modernism as an allegedly a-political, ideologically aligned movement that was deeply involved with the national project of modernization/ acceleration. The domain-specific discourse of acceleration, which was initially established by self-appointed speed-pioneers of American letters and energized by other actors in the field, was a considerable driving force of speed up in American letters: as actors began to base their own acts of self-validation as well as their responses to others on the new American value of speed-up, a dynamic of acceleration emerged on the level of discourse. This domain-specific development was not unique but occurred in various domains of American life and work at the time, all of which were part of an overarching discourse of acceleration. Considered retrospectively through the lens of temporality, the autonomous (literary) advances that Asch, Borden and Frank opted for appear much more radical – at least with regard to their counter-discursive nature – than the experimental advances by writers such as Williams, Moore, Cummings or Dos Passos.

In their own ways, Asch, Borden and Frank each distanced themselves from the compliance with the speed-imperative, which they saw proliferate among other ambitious actors in their field. Frank edited the counter-discursive magazine *The Seven Arts* and published countless counter-discursive texts on the cultural history of the United States; he promoted a modernized form of spirituality. Disillusioned by his work on Wall Street, Asch sympathized with the political left and published critical stories in leftist magazines such as *The New Masses*. Having permanently re-located to Europe, Borden became a well-known critical commentator on modern American life (and gender politics) as well as a popular novelist of the day.

Even though Asch, Borden and Frank were wrongfully reducing the variant of experimental writing that was just established as canonical, as critics in the field tended to do at the time, all of them felt that this particular approach was compromising the capacity of experimental texts to express a critique of modern life. They furthermore felt that it was not engaged in finding remedies for the detrimental effects of acceleration. Although Asch's, Borden's and Frank's works reveal that each of them considered stylistic experimentation crucial to a modern practice of prose writing, their 1920s' novels reveal that they considered a combination of 'the new/fast' with 'the old/slow' more suited to respond generatively to the transformations of the modern age. The scholar of American modernisms may justifiably retort that many of the techniques and strategies used – and the arguments made – by these three writers during the 1920s can actually be identified in some of the works by Williams, Moore or Cummings as well. What distinguishes the approach for which Asch, Borden and Frank independently opted, however, is the generative agenda that runs through them: in three unique ways, these novels employ style, form and content to sensitize American readers to the detrimental effects of acceleration. They present readers with feasible alternatives and remedies without categorically negating that the efficiency, time-economy, innovation and scientificity are necessary for American progress. Driven by the cause of making modern speed livable, Asch, Borden and Frank independently combined diagnosis, critique and visionary optimism in their 1920s' novels. Even though it is impossible for this study to assess whether or not these individual works indeed worked changes in contemporary readers, the fact that the ambition to do so surfaces in several experimental works of American fiction in the 1920s is remarkable in itself.

As part of the ongoing revisionism in the field, this study appeals to scholars to refrain from dismissing works such as *City Block*, *Flamingo* and *The Office* as "Accidental Modernisms" that are imperfect or incongruent in comparison to 'American modernism proper.' Still in 2000, Angela K. Smith for instance argued that Borden was inspired to experiment in her war writings solely by the 'shock' that she suffered when encountering modern warfare, "rather than by any particularly desire to be innovatory" (71). As the present study demonstrates, a more comprehensive insight into the genesis of such experimental, yet somewhat unconventional texts can be gained if they are re-examined in the discursive context, in which they were produced. Indeed, not only Borden's poetry and prose "was deliberate" and "consciously anti-conventional" in its aesthetic and agenda (Hutchinson, Introductio xv; Kaplan 35; cf. Higonnet, Introduction xxvii). During the roaring twenties, Asch and Frank, too, experimented with form and style to implement a generative effect in their novels. The fact that all of these writers independently and profoundly engaged with the overarching discourse of acceleration and devised unique, yet comparable stylistic and narratological mechanisms to undermine this very discourse reveals that they were authors who should be counted among the avant-garde of American experimental writers in the modern age, albeit not among the group that Williams, Moore and others formed at the time. Retrospectively, their practice can be classified as an alternate practice of modern American writing.

IV CONCLUDING REMARKS: ACCELERATION AND DECELERATION THEN AND NOW

It is not a coincidence that I set my glance upon experimental novels from the modern era, which addresses the phenomenon of acceleration and explore means of coping with it, at this point in time. *City Block, The Office* and *Flamingo* may stir both a feeling of nostalgia and topicality in us: We approach them as forgotten works of a bygone era – the historical book jacket of *The Office*, adorned with a drawing of high-rise skyscrapers, the small cubist image printed on the opening pages of *City Block* and the illustration of a flamingo among New York skyscrapers on the cover of *Flamingo* alone have assumed a historical charm. Yet the theme addressed in these novels, the diagnoses presented in them and the remedies each of them proposes will quite possibly startle readers of this day and age. Although they date back almost a century, there is a certain contemporaneity to them. They seem more relevant than ever in this digital age, in which people face a "blizzard of distractions" almost everywhere they turn (Mikics 25).

Six years after the 1929 stock market crash, the regionalist painter Grant Wood noted that "during boom times conservatism is a thing to be ridiculed, but under unsettling conditions it becomes a virtue" (qtd. in Conn 4). As the two parts of this study have revealed, any sort of conservatism – ranging from an outright rejection of speed to a critical, yet generative renegotiation of it – came under attack in the decades prior to the stock market crash. Speed-up had become a new American value and norm. In the overarching discourse of acceleration, speed-pioneers were celebrated as national heroes and those who seemed to lag behind were scolded as failures. Domain-specific discourses emerged as actors began to base their acts of self-validation as well as their responses to others on the norm and imperative of acceleration, which ambitious speed-pioneers had established to legitimize their practices in modern America. Wood's notion holds true again today: In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2007/08, which alerted many to the fragility of the hyper-accelerated digital systems that transformed people's lives during the second wave of acceleration, a new era seems to have dawned: Today, many regard the preservation of 'the slow and old' as a virtuous cause. 'Slow' is *en vogue*. Waldo Frank's comment that "we are proud of the short cuts with which we clutter and sterilize our world, [...] [b]ut [...] [t]he between is life. [...] [L]ife's loveliness [...] dawns on men only when they are forced to pause" ("Drug" 53–54) rings true again; it sounds as though it is taken directly from one of the programmatic texts published by contemporary slow movements or from a self-help book that advocates the healing effects of deceleration on body and soul. Similarly, the contention that "slowness can become a way of signaling an alternative set of values or a refusal to privilege the workplace over other domains of our life," as phrased by Wendy Parkins and Geoffrey Craig in their 2006 study *Slow Living* (1), sounds like a statement that Nathan Asch could have uttered in a comment on his novel *The Office* in the 1920s. The persistent "modern obsession with saving time," deeply engrained in people today, is being countered by a "cult of rural tranquility" and slowness (Honoré, *Praise* 103, 94) that seems to proliferate much more strongly than it did when Asch, Borden and Frank simultaneously but independently set themselves and their novels against the cult of speed in early twentieth-century America.

As it was the case a century ago, a number of visionary oppositional voices addressed the negative repercussions of the digital revolution already before the crash: In 1986, the leftist activist Carlo Petrini and some of his fellows for instance protested on Piazza di Spagna in Rome against the opening of a McDonald's restaurant, thereby initiating a movement that has since enlisted 1.000.000 supporters and 100.000 members and has spread to 160 countries.[350] With the foundational document, the "Slow Food Manifesto"[351] written by the Italian poet Folco Portinari in 1987, the movement set itself against the "virus" of "the fast life" which, they claim, spread in form of a lifestyle that is "modelled" on a machine. As a "vaccine" against this lifestyle, the movement proposes "an adequate portion of sensual gourmandize pleasures, to be taken with slow and prolonged enjoyment" ("Slow Food Manifesto" 1). In 1998, Stephen Bertman wrote in his study *Hyperculture: The Human Cost of Speed* that "just realizing that speed can have negative consequences gives us immeasurable control over the core of our lives by rousing us from passivity" (198). Many actors today follow the lead of such visionary critics as Bertman or such visionary movements as Slow Food: They address the downside of acceleration and devise strategies to deal with the detrimental effects of accelerated living in generative ways.

Business coaches continue to train their clients to succeed through increasing their speed: In his book *Strategic Acceleration* (2010), Tony Jeary for instance invites his readers to "[t]urn the page to accelerate your success and succeed at the speed of life!" and brags about his success in training some of America's leading businessmen in the "high-tech facility" of his "Strategic Acceleration Studio" (6, 4, 4). Timothy Ferriss' '4-hour' self-help books about "hyperkinetic entrepreneurialism of the body and soul" rocket to the top of the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* bestseller lists (Mead) – newspapers in which the discourse of acceleration had registered already in the late nineteenth century. Meanwhile, however, the number of individuals and collectives who reiterate Bertman's contention that "[w]e must come to see that 'slow' is not necessarily bad, nor 'fast' necessarily good" and who explore feasible ways of combatting the negative effects of fast living grows (194). Just as Asch, Borden and Frank, many of these relatively unconnected slow movements call for "a conscious negotiation of life in the present, rather than a nostalgic retreat to an imagined community or pastoral golden age" – and in this respect, they differ from reactionary 'downsizing' movements such as Voluntary Simplicity (Parkins/Craig 3). In the interest to develop alternate ways of living 'better' lives in the digital world, many promote a strategy of productive rebalancing as a way to counter the negative effects of fast living. Similar to Bertman, who proposes that people should take a "'time out' [...] to review, to evaluate, to plan new strategies" (195; cf. Honoré, *Slow Fix*), the sociologist John Tomlinson proposes "to 'fold in' the value of existential balance to an affirmative attitude towards acceleration," thus "taking positive control of life" by employing "a process of constant reflexive re-balancing in the face of contingency" (158). Slow movements in general, as Carl Honoré points out, are also in fact "not about doing everything at a snail's pace" but they aim to envision ways "to live better by striking a balance between fast and slow" (*Praise* 15, 18).[352] In her "Slow-Books Manifesto," Maura Kelly advises the followers of her blog to "turn to literature – to works that took some time to write and will take some time to read" during "leisure moments" because this will "help us unwind" (Kelly) and Thomas H. Eriksen, author of *Tyranny of the Moment* (2001), stresses that "the project [of coping] [...] must consist in finding a balance" and in "*switch*[ing] *consciously between fast and slow time*" because "[c]*reativity,*" for instance, "is produced in the gaps" in our fast-paced schedules (164, 159, 156, 156). Geoff Mulgan, chief executive officer of Nesta, a British "innovation foundation" set to "tackle the big challenges of our time," notes that "alongside speed and flexibility we also need to remember the importance of balance: [...] of public spaces for quiet and reflection like parks and churches where time stands still; of home life as well as work life" (86). While these advocates of slowness imagine that the act of re-balancing can be completed within slow enclaves in accelerated media environments, the week-long retreat to a monastery has become a popular way of escaping the frenzy of hyper-accelerated work life for a longer period on a regular basis (cf. Honoré, *Praise* 127; Parkins/Craig 2).[353]

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[350] These numbers are listed on the website *Slow Food*.

[351] Since, various manifestos for slowness have been published, seemingly in late response to such modernist speed-manifestos as written by the Futurist Marinetti or the Vorticists Pound and Lewis: See, for instance, Benedikt Köhler, Sabria David and Jörg Blumtritt's "Slow Media Manifesto," Maura Kelly's "Slow-Books Manifesto" or Elaina Giolando's "Slow Travel Manifesto."

To the reader of this study, these recent interventions in favor of slower, more balanced lifestyles will not sound altogether new. The parks (and churches) Mulgan refers to as enclaves of stillness call to mind that such places figure as the time-scapes in which Sophie Breddan, Karl Loer and Paula Desstyn experience 'unity/Wholeness' in *City Block*. The idea of a separate, decelerated life in the home calls up Henry Clarke's suburban herotopia (in *The Office*) as well as Peter Campbell's replica of Wellowburn in rural Long Island (in *Flamingo*). Kelly's admittedly vague proposition that a leisurely engagement with complex cultural works can be soothing bring to mind the suggestion that Peter can calm down and attain a (vicarious) sense of cultural identity in the underground jazz club in *Flamingo*. Finally, Erikson's proposition that creativity emerges in times of repose is reminiscent of Harry Widener's gradual development of an ideal life and Marc Kranz' nighttime vision (in *The Office*) as well as of the inspirational moments during which Peter develops his architectural designs (in *Flamingo*). What is more, the coping strategy of moving in-between 'the fast' and 'the slow' – of balancing out the negative effects of fast living through momentary deceleration – is presented in Asch's and Borden's 1920s' novels as well.

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[352] Slow Food, for instance, promotes "the adoption of balanced diets and lifestyles oriented towards quality, diversity and moderation" ("Slow Food International" 2).

[353] Note that the initiatives for slowness addressed here stand exemplary for a much greater watershed of initiatives, which has been chronicled, for instance, by Carl Honoré in *In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed* (2004), by Wendy Parkins and Geoffrey Craig in *Slow Living* (2006) or by Nick Osbaldiston in *Culture of the Slow: Social Acceleration in an Accelerated World* (2013).

The values embraced and promoted by individual or collective proponents of (momentary) slow-down today represent another striking diachronic link to the visionary novels by Asch, Borden and Frank. Just as each of these novels, slow proponents such as Vidhya Alakeson stress that the ultimate "challenge we face" is to "chang[e] the values and expectations" so that "people have the freedom to choose a meaningful life, whether that is lived in the slow or fast lane" (153). The visions presented in *City Block, The Office* and *Flamingo* differ in focus and accessibility, as the three case studies in this thesis demonstrate. Nevertheless, they are based on a relatively homogenous set of values which are all premised on slowness – values that slow movements today promote as well: community, historicity, wellbeing as well as a sense of self that arises from (emotional) *Erfahrung* and agency. Just as Asch, Borden and Frank did almost a century ago, commentators today consider the re-introduction of slowness into hyper-accelerated lives as essential to make them more livable.

The appeals for slower living today often stress the need of a general revalidation of 'the old and slow.' As the portrayals of rural life in *Flamingo*, Slow Food (and its offshoots in the domain of beverages)[354] for instance favor the preservation of local (food) cultures and the defense of "old-fashioned food traditions" in the name of biodiversity ("Slow Food Manifesto" 1). A revalidation of tradition, for instance in form of "traditional knowledge" which "has been reinforced by practice and handed down orally inside families and communities" ("Central Role" 15), however, also here never entails a categorical rejection of progress. Slow Food stresses that "only through dialogue, dialectics and the mutual exchange between these two realms of knowledge" – 'traditional knowledge' and scientific knowledge developed by the industry – "is it possible to imagine a sustainable future" ("Central Role" 15). Bertman more broadly underlines the importance of preserving ancestral memories and ethnic traditions for communities and individuals to "regain[] a sense of context" and historicity to counter "the leveling force of now" in a world of eternal newness (200). Just as Frank, albeit in a much more simplistic manner, he emphasizes the value of religious traditions and rituals in such a lifeworld: "The Sabbath both joins and separates: it mends into wholeness the parts of our humanness torn by the centrifugal demands of work while separating the new-found wholeness from external forces that would destroy it" (200, 200, 195). In slow manifestoes, a rhetoric of reenchantment and salvation has become commonplace.[355]

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[354] See for instance Fritz Hahn's article "Call it the Slow-Drink Movement" in the *Washington Post*, April 4, 2008 issue. The vogue for Craft Beer belongs to the same category. In Germany, Austria, Italy and Switzerland, a Slow Brewing quality seal has been introduced (*Slow Brewing*).

While Slow Food and its offshoot *Citta Slow* put importance on the preservation (or resurrection) of social interaction and "conviviality" as essentials of human well-being ("Central Role" 16; cf. "Slow Food International" 1), they promise that slowness will improve individuals' wellbeing, too. Not only is "slow and prolonged enjoyment," in this case of food, identified as a route to "pleasure[]" ("Slow Food Manifesto" 1), as the decelerated *Erfahrung* of physical intercourse in *City Block*'s portrayal. Slow Food furthermore presents stress-ridden people with the prospect of a "different quality of life" that is, according to their promise to "contribute to the creation of a culture of health," "based upon respect for natural rhythms, [...] the consumption and enjoyment of food of the highest possible quality" ("Slow Food International" 2). Proponents of slow proclaim in unison with Asch's story "Henry Clarke" that individuals who choose to grow crops themselves become "a harmonious part of natural systems, [...] drawing from them a means of sustenance and a gratification that few jobs in the world can equal" and lead "more 'grounded' lives" ("Central Role" 17; Parkins/Craig 2).

The portrayal in "Henry Clarke" similarly overlaps with Kelly's suggestion that slow activities not only re-synchronize and re-connect individuals with their natural surroundings but provide them with a sense of identity: slow reading "makes us *us*, shaping our consciences and our identities" and our "self-awareness" (Kelly). According to contemporary commentators, part of this is that individuals living in a world of speed need to reclaim their individual agency, liberating themselves from the pressure and compulsion to act quickly: While Asch's novel uses focalization and stylistic experiments to acquaint the reader with the clerk's or Henry Clarke's mental emancipation from the regime of speed, Clay Johnson stresses that people need to establish a healthier information diet by choosing more rigorously which information they consume (*The Information Diet*) and the slow movement claims that people who (re-)establish a "local economy and small scale [production]" in a kind of "participatory democracy" will be able to "take hold of our [their] lives" ("Central Role" 20).

Now as then, "[t]o declare the value of slowness in our work, in our personal life, in public life, is to promote a position counter to the dominant value-system of 'the times'" (Parkins/Craig 1). As Tim Aldrich puts it, "[w]e may kid ourselves that we can freely choose our own pace but society's values and expectations restrain us and flouting them requires courage and determination" (150). In fact, many of today's proponents of Slow share the view that a prerequisite for a person to recognize and adopt slowness as a value is a process of disillusionment: he needs to develop a more realistic, less biased outlook that fosters a determination in him to oppose commonly accepted norms and values. Accordingly, Bertman argues that "we must reject two illusions: that what is new is automatically better than what is old, and that what is fast is necessarily better than what is slow. Next, we must be wary of the subtle but cumulative price we pay for every element of artificiality we install in our lives. Last, we must be mindful to conserve those parts of our world not yet invaded by technology" (198). While grassroots movements such as Slow Food rely on their on- and offline campaigns to trigger this process, others have recently claimed that literary texts have the potential to do the same – and perhaps even more effectively.

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[355] For a more extensive analysis of this "rise of the mythology of slow life," as well as of the commercialization of the slow logo, see Marzena Kubisz' study *Resistance in the Deceleration Lane: Velocentrism, Slow Culture and Everyday Practice* (14).

Whereas proponents of slow (or 'deep') reading tend to place the responsibility on the reader to take pauses to reflect, to bring more of his "inner being into the act of reading," to discover the deeper levels of meaning in the narrative and to develop a critique (Miedema 65; cf. Mikics 1, 32),[356] others have claimed that the design of the literary text itself can trigger these operations in the reader: They discuss the different reading experiences that online texts or "fast books [...] produced primarily for profit" engender: In contrast to texts that "employ literary techniques (e.g., complex characters, poetic language, rhythm, symbolism) to tell stories that probe the human condition," these texts "disrupt, rather than encourage, reflection and critical thinking" (Lacy, *Slow Books* 11, 9; cf. Miedema 45). Meagan Lacy refers to Anton Chekhov's 1899 short story "Lady with the Toy Dog" to support her argument that a literary text produces a "significantly greater change in personality traits and emotions" than a factual account of its plot (11). The present study examines three different 1920s' configurations of plot, style, form and narrative design that had a similar effect and it would be a project worth pursuing to look for (experimental) texts that explore new ways of doing so during the second wave of acceleration. While the librarian Lacy does neither explain which 'elements' in the literary text condition the effect she describes,[357] nor gives any recent examples, Lutz Koepnick's exploration of the "programmatic poetics of slow reading" in Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* (2010) is groundbreaking. In his 2014 cross-medial study *On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary*, Koepenick uses DeLillo's novel as his literary example for an "aesthetic [of] slowness," which he traces in various recent works that "experiment[] with extended structures of temporality, with strategies of hesitation, delay, and deceleration, in an effort to make us pause" and "reflect[] about competing visions of time, movement, progress, and change" (213, 41, 8, 41).[358] In his close analysis of *Point Omega*'s style, Koepenick argues that the "terse and understated [...] diction" as well as the "non sequiturs" and "incantations whose challenging logic borders the surreal" do not "push and pull us forward but [...] make[] us pause and hesitate" (213–14). This claim reverberates with the appropriations of fast styles in *City Block*, *The Office* and *Flamingo*. In *Flamingo*, a combination of fast style and critical content in literary chronotopes of the metropolis is used to make the reader pause and pit such a portrayal against familiar accounts of urban business, planning and architecture. The terse diction used in the portrayal of Sophie Breddan's psychological state in "Murder" (*City Block*) invites the reader to pause and reflect upon the portrayed scene and on the unconventional use of style in this instance. The same is the case in passages from "One of the Clerks" (*The Office*), in which techniques of textual acceleration are employed to evoke that the agitated clerk's mind moves freely in the act of critical thinking after the office has failed.

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[356] See for instance John Miedema's volume *Slow Reading*, which is designed to provide practical suggestions and a set of rules for slow reading, such as "Be Patient" (53). David Mikics' *Slow Reading in a Hurried Age*, too, aims to "show you [the reader] how to read in a strong and productive way, a way that increases your mind's creative power" (8).

[357] Kelly's comment that the 'slow books' she refers to are "[s]trong narratives" that "invite[] us to see the world in a different way, demands that we interpret unusual descriptions, and pushes our memories to recall characters and plot details" is hardly any more specific.

To look into the similarities that exist between literary responses to the first and second acceleratory waves is certainly worthwhile because it might equip present proponents of Slow with a historical awareness and might encourage them to look for other precursors of such writers as DeLillo and such novels as *Point Omega*. To note that counter-discursive actors of the modern age were ahead of their time or to lump them together with twentieth-century authors, however, would neither do justice to the specific historical discourses that triggered Asch, Borden and Frank to take action at roughly the same time, nor to the unique yet comparable compositions they opted for in their novels.

As the combined analytical work in both parts of this study has revealed, Asch, Borden and Frank were opposing the discourse of acceleration, which had materialized both in their own field of engagement and as an overarching normative dynamic at the time. Taking into account the probability that this would disqualify them as prominent literary figures in the eyes of contemporary (author-)critics, each of them set out to stylize him or herself as an author of a different kind through discursive acts. In their unique responses to the discourse of acceleration, Asch, Borden and Frank neither took sides with those who patriotically celebrated American speed pioneering nor with those cultural conservatives who called for a return to a slower past. Instead pursuing a generative agenda, all of them brought these diametrically opposed positions into dialogue, destabilizing normative and ideological dichotomies upon which both of these positions thrived (i.e., ‘fast/new’ vs. ‘old/slow’) and reconciling them on a middle ground. An aesthetic of in-betweenness, albeit in different actualizations, marks their 1920s’ novels – an aesthetic that appears specially designed to create a critical awareness in the reader, to invite her to challenge dichotomic normative conceptions and to animate her to work a change as well. In neither of these novels, however, does such a change entail a return to an allegedly better, slower past. In each, there transpires a vision of modern life in which the ‘the fast/new’ is combined with ‘the slow/old’ in a unique way. Whereas the mystic Frank envisioned that a community of ‘Persons’ will regain their sense of selfhood and agency in the modern world of speed by living in the constant awareness that they are part of a greater ‘Whole,’ the feminist Borden proposed that both men and women should combine their enthusiasm about progress/speed with a critical awareness and an appreciation of ‘the old and slow.’ Asch, finally, imagined that people emancipate themselves from the imperative of acceleration at times and employ the strategy of generative re-balancing to counteract the effects of fast living.

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[358] As Koepenick points out, "DeLillo's text wants to be read two words a second. It leads the reader into a desert of language in which each word counts like a tiny planet creeping up between the rocks. While the novel itself is utterly short, it stretches right in front of reader's eyes into something remarkably extended – a texture of epidemic proportion. Unlike other contemporary authors concerned with the theme of slowness (think of Stan Nadolny's 1987 *The Discovery of Slowness*, Milan Kundera's 1995 *Slowness*, and J.M. Coetzee's 2005 *Slow Man,* as well as the weaving prose of W. G. Sebald) DeLillo investigates slowness as a means to radically question the politics of narrative time and remake the modes of readerly attention. His writing withholds narrative riches and delays conclusive answers with the aim of awakening us from our ordinary numbness" (213).

Taking these three writers and these three experimental novels about urban life in the roaring twenties into focus, this study provides a first retrospective systematization of the alternate practice. It lays the groundwork for a more wide-ranging exploration of this practice in the future. A scrutiny of additional aesthetically hybrid city novels from the 1920s would further a more comprehensive conception of the practice, as concerns the thematic, aesthetic and ideological correspondences that surface in alternate novels in spite of their differences. This would furthermore enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the prevalence which this practice gained in 1920s’ American prose.

A reconsideration of a writer such as Kay Boyle, whom Suzanne Clarke includes in her volume on *Sentimental Modernism*, and her debut novel *Process* (1924/25) might be insightful, for instance.[359] A *Bildungsroman* in essence, *Process* tells the story of Kerith Day, who challenges the value system she encounters in industrial Cincinnati. Throughout the novel, it becomes evident that the dynamism, the economy and the sense of exhilaration that characterize the experimental text are not meant to denote a form of acceleration but a different sort of rhythm that Kerith encounters in the natural world, to which she escapes time and again. *Process* has been termed “unusual and noteworthy in American modernist writing;” it is deemed “a pivotal text for reassessing literary modernism” (Spanier xxiv, ix; cf. Austenfeld 2; Ellis 41). Another forgotten novel that might be worth examining in this context is Janet Flanner’s 1926 *The Cubical City*,[360] a novel about a young, independent costume designer on Broadway which was promoted by its publisher G.P. Putnam as a novel in which an “image of Manhattan takes shape” (*Saturday Review of Literature* 4 Dec.

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[359] Although written in 1924/25, *Process* was lost on the way to a prospective publisher and published only in 2001, when the manuscript was rediscovered in the New York Public Library.

[360] The novel was republished in the Lost American Fiction series by Southern Illinois University Press in 1974.

1926). Just as Asch's, Borden's and Frank's novels, *The Cubical City* was described by reviewers as a novel in which "an obviously talented writer is attempting to work out for herself an original and individual stylistic idiom" but "has not yet solved her problem" ("*The Cubical City*, by Janet Flanner" 344). In 1922, Flanner had moved to Paris and had become part of the expatriate avant-garde, associating herself with such experimental writers as Djuna Barnes and Nancy Cunard.[361]

In continuation of the present study as well as of Koepenick's insightful reading of DeLillo, it would furthermore be promising to explore whether the aesthetic approach and agenda that Koepenick identifies in *Point Omega* constitutes a larger (or at least a recognizable) trend in contemporary prose writing. Considering that Ursula K. Heise deems postmodernist fiction "to some extent conditioned by the accelerated temporal rhythms of late-capitalist technologies of production and consumption" (6),[362] it seems promising to explore the question whether the return to a slower aesthetic and closed narrative forms in so-called 'post-postmodern' or 'neo-realist' fiction (cf. McLaughlin 55, 86) could be understood as a decelerating, hence counter-cultural turn in avant-garde literature of the day.

It remains to be seen whether deceleration, for instance in form of momentary re-balancing, will gain a durable and profound presence in today's hyper-accelerated world in and beyond the domain of literature; whether it will lead to a permanent reconfiguration of the normative order. At least Rosa seems to be optimistic that slowness will come to co-exist with 'the fast' in people's lives. He notes that slowness is emerging as a new marker of distinction today (cf. *Beschleunigung* 220). An even greater optimism runs through Paul H. Ray and Sherry R. Anderson's study *The Cultural Creatives*. A "long-anticipated" but still unorganized "subculture of Americans," replete with a new "worldview, values, and way of life," has spread among 26 per cent of United States citizens between the 1960s and the millennium, Ray and Anderson claim (5, 4, 4). This subculture advocates an alternative kind of progress, which is strongly reminiscent of the visions of change that Asch, Borden and Frank proposed in the 1920s: Aiming to "shap[e] a new kind of American culture," the Cultural Creatives put "emphasis on relationships and women's perspectives, [show a] commitment to spirituality and psychological development, [and parade their] disaffection with the large institutions of modern life [...] [as well as their] rejection of materialism" (4). Ray and Anderson consider it possible that this proliferating subculture "may be reshaping it [the dominant set of values] in our larger culture" in the future (7). Notably, those who do not enlist with the Cultural Creatives are labelled 'the Moderns' in this study. Just as (reductively as) Asch and Frank did throughout their non-fictional texts, Ray and Anderson describe them as "the people who accept the commercialized urban-industrial world as the obvious right way to live. They're not looking for alternatives. They're adapting to the contemporary world by assuming [...] those values linked to economic and public life" (27). Their "official ideology," Ray and Anderson claim, is still "laid out in detail, day after day," in such papers as the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* (25), which were venues in which the discursive dynamic of acceleration unfolded in the late nineteenth century, as the first part of this study reveals.

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[361] Flanner is remembered primarily for her reportorial work, namely the fortnightly "Paris Letter" she wrote for *The New Yorker* between 1925 and 1976, using the pen name Genêt.

[362] She proclaims that "postmodernist novels are centrally concerned with the possibility and modalities of experiencing time in the age of posthistory and the nanosecond culture" – a problem that poses itself due to the proliferation of vastly different time scales (time/history of the universe's existence vs. the nanosecond) that "weaken[s] [...] individual as well as social or historical time as parameters of organizing narrative" (2, 7).

Whether or not one believes that the revolution prophesized by Ray and Anderson will come to pass, the prose texts recovered in this study are noteworthy because they seem designed to initiate a grass-roots revolution similar to the one described by these two scholars already in the 1920s. Today, novels such as *City Block*, *Flamingo* and *The Office* may still prompt readers to pause and to reflect on acceleration, to re-read the novel and to reconsider their accustomed ways as well as to seize opportunities for change that present themselves within these novels. The recovery of alternate writers and their novels from the first wave of acceleration might not only widen scholars' critical gaze to yet unacknowledged facets of modern American literature. While news applications on the cellphone, for instance, help people today to keep up to speed with their lifeworld (Rosa/Lorenz 15), such novels may prompt readers beyond academia to adopt a disillusioned optimism and even potentially animate them to try and make their lives in a digitalized, globalized world more livable by re-integrating 'the slow' within it.

More importantly, these novels may not only help scholars today reinstate some of the complexities of the emergence of various modernisms in early twentieth-century America. Moreover, they have the potential to create an awareness in the reader about the historical dimensions of their current situation which might prevent them from adopting alarmist/reactionary positions in response to the deep-reaching transformations they face during the second wave of acceleration. By revealing to them that people living through the first wave of this kind addressed a set of strikingly similar problems and anxieties in their 1920s' novels, these very novels may alleviate people's alarm about the possible impact of sensory overstimulation in today's digital media environment and about the apparent danger of losing a sense of self and community as well as stable reference points in morals and tradition. Despite their imperfections and the challenges they represent for contemporary readers, these novels may help to transform the defensive responses that a feeling of threat usually triggers into a motivation to engage with the sources of this very threat in generative ways: In this day and age, the historicity that such critical, yet visionary novels about accelerated city life as *City Block*, *Flamingo* and *The Office* have gained enhance their potential to animate readers to approach the phenomenon of acceleration in a generative rather than in a reactionary manner, possibly assisting them in devising new coping mechanisms that make speed more livable in the age of the nanosecond.

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