

DEATH
AND DESIRE
IN CAR
CRASH
CULTURE

DEATH
AND DESIRE
IN CAR
CRASH
CULTURE

A CENTURY OF
ROMANTIC FUTURISMS

RICARDA VIDAL



Peter Lang Oxford

First published in 2013 by

Peter Lang Ltd
International Academic Publishers
52 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LU
United Kingdom

www.peterlang.com

Ricarda Vidal has asserted her moral right under the Copyright, Designs
and Patents Act of 1988 to be identified as the Author of this Work.

© Peter Lang Ltd 2013

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized
in any form, by any electronic, mechanical or other means,
now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording,
or in any information storage or retrieval system, without the prior permission,
in writing, of the Publishers.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 000-0-000000-00-0 (tbc)

COVER ILLUSTRATIONS:

Arnold Odermatt. *Buochs*, 1965, 1965, gelatin silver print, 30 × 40 cm.

© Urs Odermatt, Windisch / DACS; Courtesy: Springer & Winckler Galerie, Berlin.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission
for the use of copyright material. The publisher apologizes for any errors or omissions
in the above list and would be grateful for notification of any corrections that
should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

Printed in the United Kingdom by the MPG Books Group

Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgements	xi
Introduction	1
PART I In Love with Speed and the Machine: The Futurist Mechanical Utopia (1909–)	21
1 Three Hundred Electric Moons: The Futurists' Defiance of Death and Romantic Nature	23
2 Systematic Chaos: Fordism as a Practical Realization of Futurism	47
PART II The Joys and Woes of Driving: The Utopia Realized (1950–)	61
3 Life (and Death) on the Road: The Beat Generation and the Road Movie	63
4 The Infinite Repetition of the Accidentdentdent: Andy Warhol and Antun Maračić	85
5 Caspar David Friedrich through a Broken Windscreen: Arnold Odermatt's Peaceful Crash Scenes	101
6 In Praise of Slow Motion: Julio Cortázar, Carol Dunlop and Jean-Luc Godard on the Motorway of the South	119

PART III (Wo)man is the Machine: Death, Desire and the Crash (1970–)	137
7 Crash-Desire: The Post-Erotic Machine Men of J. G. Ballard’s and David Cronenberg’s <i>Crash</i>	139
8 Sheer Driving Pleasure: Sarah Lucas’s Human Cars and the Death of the Car as Machine	159
9 Women Take the Wheel: Quentin Tarantino’s <i>Death Proof</i>	175
Afterword	187
Notes	191
Bibliography	213
Index	231

List of Illustrations

Plates

1. Giacomo Balla, *Abstract Speed*, 1913, oil on canvas, 53 × 75cm, inc. painted frame. Private collection. © DACS.
2. Giacomo Balla, *Abstract Speed + Noise*, 1913–1914, oil on board, 54.5 × 76.5 cm, inc. painted frame. Collection Peggy Guggenheim, New York, Rome. © DACS.
3. Giacomo Balla, *Abstract Speed – the Car Has Passed*, 1913, oil on canvas, 50.2 × 65.4 cm. Tate Gallery, London. © DACS.
4. ‘Real cars and real dumb people driving ‘em’ ... Stuntman Mike in his black Dodge chases the girls in Kowalski’s Challenger. Still from *Death Proof* (Dir. Quentin Tarantino, Momentum Pictures, 2007).
5. Andy Warhol, *Green Burning Car I*, 1963, silk-screen ink and acrylic on linen, 203.2 × 228.6 cm. Private collection, Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich. © DACS.
6. Giacomo Balla, *Speeding Automobile*, 1913, oil on cardboard, 60 × 98 cm. Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna, Collection Grassi, Milan. © DACS.
7. Sarah Lucas, *Life’s a Drag (Organs)*, 1998, two family saloon cars, cigarettes; each car: 146 × 473 × 180 cm. © The artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London.
8. Abernathy has a fag sitting on the Mustang. Still from *Death Proof* (Dir. Quentin Tarantino, Momentum Pictures, 2007).

Figures

1. *Heavenly Vehicle of Ezechiel's Vision*, 1596, anonymous copperplate etching following instructions by Juan Baptista Villalpando.
2. Pablo Echaurren, *Untitled* (from *Iconoclasta* series), 1994, collage, 34 × 24 cm. Artist's possession. © The artist.
3. Giacomo Balla, *Girl Running on the Balcony*, 1912, oil on canvas, 125 × 125 cm. Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Collection Grassi, Milan. © DACS.
4. Diego Rivera, detail of the West Wall, *Detroit Industry*, 1932–1933, fresco, Detroit Institute of Arts. © DACS.
5. Diego Rivera, detail of the North Wall, *Detroit Industry*, 1932–1933, fresco, Detroit Institute of Arts. © DACS.
6. Antonio Sant'Elia, design for the Città Nuova, 1914.
7. Kowalski's white Challenger lifts off and flies. Still from *Vanishing Point* (Dir. Richard Sarafian, Twentieth Century Fox, 1971).
8. Kowalski vanishes into endless circles in the desert. Still from *Vanishing Point* (Dir. Richard Sarafian, Twentieth Century Fox, 1971).
9. Eadweard Muybridge, "*Phryne L' Leaping a 3'6" Hurdle*", 1879, detail of plate 46 from the series *Attitudes of Animals in Motion*, paper print, 16 × 22.4 cm. Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.
10. Antun Maračić, print from the series *Cro Car Crash Chronicle*, 2001–2002, digital print on graphic paper, 18.2 × 25.7 cm. © The artist and Miroslav Kraljević Gallery, Zagreb.
11. Antun Maračić, print from the series *Sideroad Monuments*, 1999–2002, colour print, 50 × 60 cm. © The artist and Miroslav Kraljević Gallery, Zagreb.
12. Caspar David Friedrich, *Abbey in an Oak Forest*, 1809–1810, oil on canvas, 110.4 × 171 cm. Nationalgalerie (Galerie der Romantik), Berlin.
13. Caspar David Friedrich, *Winter*, 1834, sepia and pencil, 19.2 × 27.5 cm. Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

14. Arnold Odermatt, *Stansstad, 1967*, 1967, gelatin silver print, 30 × 40 cm. © Urs Odermatt, Windisch / DACS; courtesy of Springer & Winckler Galerie, Berlin.
15. Arnold Odermatt, *Beckenried, 1969*, 1969, gelatin silver print, 30 × 40 cm. © Urs Odermatt, Windisch / DACS; courtesy of Springer & Winckler Galerie, Berlin.
16. Arnold Odermatt, *Dallenwil, 1978*, 1978, gelatin silver print, 40 × 30 cm. © Urs Odermatt, Windisch / DACS; courtesy of Springer & Winckler Galerie, Berlin.
17. Enjoying a game of chess next to an overturned car in Godard's endless traffic jam. Still from *Week End* (Dir. Jean-Luc Godard, Comacico, 1967).
18. 'My Hermès handbag!' Still from *Week End* (Dir. Jean-Luc Godard, Comacico, 1967).
19. Landscape strewn with car wrecks. Still from *Week End* (Dir. Jean-Luc Godard, Comacico, 1967).
20. Catherine fantasizes about Vaughan as she has sex with James. Still from *Crash* (Dir. David Cronenberg, Fineline Features, 1996).
21. Vaughan woos Catherine on the highway. Still from *Crash* (Dir. David Cronenberg, Fineline Features, 1996).
22. James gets excited by the new orifices of Gabrielle's mechanical body as they have sex in her car. Still from *Crash* (Dir. David Cronenberg, Fineline Features, 1996).
23. Sarah Lucas, *No Limits!*, 1999, detail; BMW, fibreglass and mechanical arm, 148 × 180 × 460 cm. © The artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London.
24. Sarah Lucas, *Car Park*, Cologne, 1997, installation view: *Islington Diamonds* with a wall-filling blow-up of *Concrete Void* in the background; smashed family saloon car and photocollage, dimensions variable. © The artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London.
25. 'Mother warned me ...', magazine advertisement for the Dodge Charger RT, 1969.
26. Pam flirts with Stuntman Mike and his death-proof car. Still from *Death Proof* (Dir. Quentin Tarantino, Momentum Pictures, 2007).
27. The End. Still from *Death Proof* (Dir. Quentin Tarantino, Momentum Pictures, 2007).

Acknowledgements

When I first started thinking about this book I planned to study the automobile as an aesthetic object. I was inspired by the beauty of its shining aerodynamic body and the speed and independence it promised. It was the desires of car culture that interested me. However, as I began to observe the traffic around me with greater attention while cycling through London's congested streets, fighting my way past swearing bus drivers, angry commuters and shouting cabbies, I soon added death to desire and crash to car culture. However, this book is not written from a cyclist's perspective – I love to be in the driver's seat when the road is free and the speed unlimited!

This book is based on my PhD thesis, which was completed at the London Consortium in 2007 and was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. I would like to thank my supervisors Roger Luckhurst and Joe Kerr for their excellent advice and feedback during my doctoral years. I further want to thank Andrew Cross for sharing his ideas about slow motion and driving the American and British roads; Antun Maračić for a very entertaining email exchange in summer and autumn of 2010 and for sending me his wonderful short films; Robert Springer of Springer and Winckler Gallery in Berlin for providing me with material about Arnold Odermatt; and Chris Adams from the Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art for his alwaysready advice. Parts of my research for this book have already been published in two journals and as a book chapter. I am grateful to the editors for granting me permission to reproduce my work: my study of Antun Maračić's work formed part of the essay 'Quiet Crash Sites: Antun Maračić's *Cro Car Crash Chronicle, after War/hol* and *Usput spomenici/ Sideroad Monuments* and Aernout Mik's *Refraction*', published in *Altre Modernità* no. 4 (October 2010). An earlier version of

Chapter 5, 'Caspar David Friedrich through a Broken Windscreen: Arnold Odermatt's Peaceful Crash Scenes', was published with the same title in the online journal *Static*, vol. 7 (Catastrophe), (2008). Parts of chapters 1 and 9 have appeared in my essay 'Twenty-first-Century Women Drivers – Futurism's Unlikely Successors: Gender Constructions, B-Movies and Futurism', John London (ed.). *100 Years of Futurism*. London: Intellect Press, 2013.

Finally, and most of all, I want to thank my parents, without whose unwavering support I could neither have begun nor finished this book. It is dedicated to them with much love and gratitude.

A note on translations

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Catalan, French, German, Italian and Spanish are my own.

Introduction

I think that cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals: I mean the supreme creation of an era, conceived with passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage by a whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object.

— ROLAND BARTHES (1957)¹

The cultural importance of the car thrives at the same intensity as it did over fifty years ago, when Roland Barthes made this statement. The car may well be invested with the same symbolic quality in the twentieth century that the Gothic cathedrals had in the Middle Ages. Gigantic, monumental and built for eternity, these cathedrals presented the people's firm belief in a stable world system with a hell below and a heaven above, suffering in this world and eternal bliss in the other.

In the course of the centuries the world has moved on and has lost much of its erstwhile stability. The cathedrals are as empty as their promise of eternal life, but our roads are full. Fast, flexible and aerodynamic, the car sums up the way of life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: rapid, intense, changeable and under the shining sign of technology and, above all, directed to earthly rather than to heavenly bliss ... Or is it? Is this really what life is like?

STOP!

Reverse gear ... when did this perpetual motion begin? [...] The more we advance, giving us more freedom and comfort, the more we lose sight of the important things in life. Is this quest for speed going to lead to our destruction? [...] We don't have to become slaves to a top-of-the-range car, and neither should you!²

This quotation is taken from an editorial in *Belio*, a Spanish–English twenty-first-century art and design magazine, which devoted an entire volume to the car and the car crash in 2003. From the day of its invention the car has been at the centre of controversy: vilified by some, celebrated by others, admired by many and used by most. It is shiny body armour, phallic extension, or protective womb. It is a status symbol and a gateway to freedom. But it is also the metal cage that isolates people from each other – it means death and destruction and spells environmental disaster.

Possibly no other object has shaped everyday life in the Western hemisphere as much as the car. Consequently, its representation is ubiquitous across art forms. As long ago as the late fifteenth century Leonardo da Vinci designed a proto-automobile³ and in Renaissance art we can find several depictions of divine self-propelled horseless carriages. Among others there are Hans Schüpfelin's *Heavenly Vehicle of the Prophet Elias* (1505) and Lucas Cranach the Younger's *Heavenly Vehicle of Ezechiel's Vision* (1544), or the wonderful anonymous etching of the same vision which shows a horseless speeding cart propelled towards heaven in an explosion of flames (see Figure 1). However, the car properly entered the world of art and popular culture when it left the purely spiritual realm of divine visions and emerged onto the street as a three-dimensional vehicle complete with a combustion engine. Cars and film were invented almost simultaneously and their story has been closely intertwined since their inception. *Runaway Match*, a British short film from 1903, is probably the first film with cars at its centre, including an elopement by rental car and a car chase.⁴

As car races started to be held on a regular basis and speed records were set and broken with equal regularity, the car moved faster and faster into the centre of attention. It should not come as a surprise or a shock to anyone that F. T. Marinetti declared petrol and combustion engines to be divine in 1916.⁵ In the beginning of the twentieth century, the car did hold at least a semi-divine status in the popular mind, and to a certain degree it still does. The Futurists were the first wholly to appropriate the car as the driving force of culture and they were also the most radical in their unquestioning celebration of it as the apotheosis of technology and machine culture. Their enthusiasm for the car was echoed by many artists at the time and throughout the century, though not always with the same optimism.



Figure 1 *Heavenly Vehicle of Ezechiel's Vision*, 1596, anonymous copperplate etching following instructions by Juan Baptista Villalpando.

Cars themselves have been turned into artworks, such as Jacques-Henri Lartigue's celebratory photographs of early racing cars or Sonia Delaunay's customized fashion cars of the 1920s. In the 1920s and 1930s when it became fashionable for architects to design cars, Frank Lloyd Wright made the Cantilever Car, Le Corbusier the 'Voiture minimum' and Buckminster Fuller the Dymaxion car. Early twentieth-century artists like Duchamp, Dalí, Matisse and Picabia made car-inspired artworks.

Duchamp was fascinated by the machinery of the engine and Picabia loved racing, even though he ridiculed the machine cult of many of his contemporaries. Pop Art of the 1960s both fêted and demonized the car. While Warhol made serial prints of car crashes, for Richard Hamilton the motorcar was the crown of human creation. There are more and less celebratory works by Robert Rauschenberg and Roy Liechtenstein, George Segal, Frank Stella, Alexander Calder and David Hockney, Gabriel Orozco, Jenny Holzer, Silvy Fleury and Pipilotti Rist. There are Patricia Piccinini's biomorphed 'car nuggets' and Sarah Lucas's vandalized and cigarette-decorated crash cars. Architects, too, continue to design cars. In the summer of 2006, Zaha Hadid presented her version of the automobile for the twenty-first century at the motor show in London: a black-and-white bubble-like capsule that looked as though it had come straight from the 1920s. There are indeed so many artists and so many artworks inspired by the car that it would take several books to describe them all in the detail they deserve. In the course of this book I will analyse a small number of these artworks at greater length.⁶

At least in the first phase of Futurism, which lasted until roughly the start of the First World War, the car was the vehicle of choice for the inauguration of a new, technologically dominated era. After the war, the focus shifted towards the aeroplane. Futurist infatuation with the car found an outlet in numerous manifestos that laid out a blueprint for 'the world of tomorrow'. Absurd as some of their claims and projects might seem today, the Futurists' visions were quite close to our contemporary reality when it comes to the close connections between cars and culture, between speed and culture and, basically, between (wo)men and their cars. As such, Futurism will form the basis of my approach to car culture. In books about car culture, Marinetti is often quoted for the curiosity of Futurism's radical demands and its transfiguration of the automobile, but is then quickly dismissed. I believe, however, that the movement deserves a closer analysis, as many of its central ideas and concepts continue to resonate in Western culture throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is particularly true for the Futurist apotheosis of the car and its possibilities.

Just as the car almost instantly turned into the subject of artistic practice, car culture has been the subject of cultural analysis almost from the moment of its inception. Though car ownership continues to increase steadily, cars are treated more and more as a historical phenomenon. Due to the importance of the car for the American way of life, the phenomena

of hotrods, monster truck shows and the myth of Route 66, among other factors, the USA has above all been the subject of study,⁷ but in the last few years Europe has (re)claimed its place as the rival centre of (historical) car culture. Especially since its hundredth anniversary, the car has generated a vast number of historical, cultural, sociological and anthropological studies as well as several art exhibitions across Europe and America.⁸ Here the car is celebrated, vilified or simply explored as cultural artefact and defining creation of the twentieth century. Critics like Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio used the car as a vehicle for their pessimistic cultural prognoses of the end of morality and affection, and since the telecommunication revolution of the 1960s, the end of the car as transport vehicle has been prophesied various times. In 2003 L. J. K. Setright wrote:

[The end of the motorcar] should happen. The car has been throughout its life a means of communication. We have others now, means undreamed of when the car was new. They ought to supplant the car as steam displaced sail. But, on the evidence of our behaviour in the last seventy years or so, do you really think it likely that we shall let them?⁹

Setright's question is, of course, rhetorical. Cars, he argues, have too fast a grip on us to let us go.

While many of the books, essay collections and exhibition catalogues about car culture contain one or several chapters dedicated to the car crash and it is the object of numerous artworks, Mikita Brottmann was the first to dedicate an entire book to the cultural significance of the crash. Her edited collection *Car Crash Culture* (2001) is comprised of essays ranging from the author's personal crash experience to professional crash analyses and an exploration of the literary transformation of the crash, the real and the fictional crash as well as the celebrity crash. Contrary to what one might suspect from its cruel theme, the book treats neither the car nor the crash in a negative sense, but rather as a highly fascinating phenomenon and defining part of contemporary culture. Car crash culture is developed from car culture, but it is also a concept in its own right. Brottmann's term describes a culture of speed and intense life, but also a culture of rapid or gruesome death within the grave of dented metal. For the purposes of this book I will adopt and amplify Brottmann's term so that car crash culture is not only characterized by the forces of speed and destruction but also by nostalgia and the longing for a lost harmony.

Speed and the invention of the car

Judging by the increase in academic, artistic and popular interest in the car as a cultural phenomenon in the last two decades, it seems that looking back from the beginning of the twenty-first century we are finally willing to credit the car with the importance the Futurists attached to it a hundred years ago. And, confronted with the increasing pollution and the metal avalanche of ever more cars, we feel the need to analyse our relationship with this glorious machine, the 'auto-mobile', the self-moving machine.

And this brings us back to motion, the 'perpetual motion' deplored by *Belio's* editors. To fully understand *Belio's* protest, it is necessary to have a closer look at the concept of motion. Indeed 'perpetual motion' has always given as much cause for grief as for delight. It is the motor of life; without it there is only nothingness, death. Death, of course, can be 'a consummation devoutly to be wished', to quote *Hamlet*, or 'a wonderful gain', to quote Arthur Schopenhauer.¹⁰ The twentieth century, however, is generally characterized by a Nietzschean embrace of 'this perpetual motion' rather than its denial. Friedrich Nietzsche condemned the despicable weakness, the yearning for extinction and cessation of all effort, which he found in the teachings of Schopenhauer and others. He condemned all affinity for annihilation and the liberating powers of death and put forth a strong defence of changeability, desire and life. Rather than escaping the transitoriness of the world by succumbing to the death-wish, or by seeking to transcend it metaphysically, Nietzsche demanded a Dionysian celebration of life at its fullest, which includes both life and death.¹¹ While Nietzsche advocated the acceptance of death as the eventual – and necessary – aim of life, he criticized as decadent the inertia and withdrawal from the world in expectance of death. What he despised was stasis, paralysis, being dead while still alive, and we find this abjection of stasis present throughout the century. The car, the universally and easily accessible vehicle of (accelerated) motion, naturally lends itself to being the most potent symbol for this Nietzschean approach to life.

If the past and present centuries are really marked by the Nietzschean embrace of perpetual motion, why then does *Belio* – and a large part of contemporary society, as I see it – feel the need to call for a 'stop' and even the 'reverse gear'? The desire to break out of the ever-accelerating vortex of speed does not imply a cessation of effort and a descent into

Schopenhauer's dreamless sleep of death. It is just that speed has become too powerful, too fast – so fast that it obliterates life. By the end of the twentieth century, the landscape seen from the comfortable seats of a speeding car has ceased to invoke the images of dynamic spirals and cones that characterized the speed paintings of Futurism of the 1910s – it blurs into a uniform sea of colours. Speed has become such an integral part of our culture that we are no longer aware of it. Indeed, as Jeremy Millar and Michiel Schwarz remark, 'speed is often only made apparent by what we moderns would perceive of as its lack, that is, slowness.'¹² Referring to a series of speed photographs taken in 2001/2002 by the artist Hadrian Piggot from a moving motorbike, *Tate* magazine talks of 'a sort of myopic wilderness'. The photos 'are like an imprecise memory where much is lost and unexpected elements are emphasized.'¹³ Speed no longer links us with the future but produces a tableau of a blurred memory, enabling us to contemplate the past rather than the future. Piggot's photographs let us suppose that speed is no longer about dynamics but about smoothness, about being suspended in space and time, outside perpetual motion. Too much speed actually turns movement into stasis. Though artists like Piggot explore the merits of this static speed, it is generally perceived with a wary eye. Stasis is too close to death and we fear it now just as much as at the beginning of the twentieth century. In order to live we must slow down and break free from enslavement to speed.

The question we need to ask is not *Belio's* 'when did this perpetual motion begin?' but 'when did it start to *accelerate*?' Jeffrey T. Schnapp talks of an anthropology of speed and thrill, which started to evolve in the eighteenth century when the invention of the railway and improvements in mail-coach and individual-carriage technology made high-speed travel accessible to a wider population. It is an 'anthropology' insofar as it places the human subject in all its vulnerability at the centre of accelerated motion and discusses the speed-induced changes of perception and psyche.¹⁴ Earlier, Wolfgang Schivelbusch had traced the changes in perception caused by the invention of the railway. He spoke of 'panoramic travel' denoting the new way of seeing things from the viewpoint of the railway passengers from inside the carriage, who would move through space without being part of it, perceiving the landscape they traversed as moving images on the screen of the carriage windows.¹⁵

Schnapp further notes a bifurcation between passenger-centred and driver-centred modes of transport. While the first naturally gave rise to a

fascination with the rapidly moving landscape outside accompanied by a vague feeling of being at another's (technology's) mercy, the latter inspired a feeling of power and control over technology and nature. According to Schnapp, road rage existed long before the invention of the motorcar. However, there is an obvious shift from the fascination of controlling nature by driving a horse-driven carriage to the fascination with and confidence in technology experienced by the motorist. Controlling the horses, the carriage-driver directly controlled nature. The motorist, in contrast, controls nature through the medium of technology at a velocity which is far beyond the natural speed of horse power. Schnapp points to the universal attraction of children to rapid motion and quotes some of the great myths of Western civilization to illustrate his point that the pleasures and thrills of high speed have always enthralled people of all ages and backgrounds. With the invention of the car, these fantasies of speed could suddenly be enacted and experienced and promptly became food for new myths. The motorcar inaugurates a new phase in the anthropology of speed and the founding myth of this second phase must be the myth of Futurism.

The car, representative of all technology, is Futurism's main trope for establishing man's supremacy over nature.¹⁶ Because of its wide-reaching, and very visible and audible impact on society at large and the individual in particular, the car was generally perceived as the symbol and the driving element of the new industrial era. Very few years after its invention it had captured (wo)man's fascination. In Italy, Fiat opened its first factory in 1900 with thirty-five employees and an output of twenty-four cars in the first year. Ten years later it had raised its capital stock to twelve million lire, employed 2,500 workers and had built 1,215 cars. As early as 1908 the firm had established itself in North America and had export contracts with partners in France, Austria, Great Britain and Australia.¹⁷ Fiat was not only building passenger cars and racing-cars but had conquered the transport market on a much wider scale, also producing trams, train engines and taxicabs.

Fiat, it seems, was indeed spearheading Italy's industrial emergence from its Romantic past and its embrace of the new life of speed. The highly celebrated Lingotto factory in Turin, which Giacomo Mattè Trucco built for the company between 1916 and 1923, wonderfully demonstrates the infatuation of the Italian public with the car: the building was modelled on Albert Kahn's Highland Park Ford plant, but turned the American concept on its head, so that the production line was ascending and the

finished car did not emerge at street level but absurdly at the race track on the roof of the building. The Lingotto factory 'captured the drama and dynamism of the car like no other building, by seemingly combining the rational systems of Ford with the lyrical and emotional celebration of speed proclaimed by the Futurists.'¹⁸

Even in Britain, which had some of the most absurd and stifling traffic regulations (like the red flag act, which required a man with a red flag to walk in front of any motorized vehicle to warn pedestrians), the exhilaration and bravado associated with speeding prevented serious protest against reckless driving. Fatal traffic accidents were downplayed, speeding was seldom persecuted, and the 20mph speed limit, which covered the whole country, was steadfastly ignored. The fact that up until the 1920s cars were the playthings of the upper classes, who were also the ruling classes, did not help to enforce traffic laws.¹⁹

The Futurist world of speed and technology

The uncompromising pursuit of speed and the celebration of the car were blown up into the great heroic theme of Futurism by its founder F. T. Marinetti. Led by a blind faith in the powers of technology, Marinetti celebrated the beauty of speed and the concept of dynamism as the humanly controlled forces of nature, the twin conquerors of space and time. These would instigate a new mechanical universe, home to a new man, a hybrid between man and machine. Though, as I will show in the first part of this book, Futurism needed the destruction of the initial crash in order to be born and also to overcome it, the parameters of its world exclude it. Indeed the mythologized version of Marinetti's crash in the 'Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' (1909) is the only time that it appears in Futurist art and literature. While there are hundreds of paintings of speed and cars in motion, there is not a single depiction of the car crash. In Futurism, speed is still glorious motion, and the fatal crash, which will become the main object of artistic interest later in the century, does not happen. Though born through the inaugurating crash, the Futurist world is a world before the crash. It is a world constituted by the perpetual motion of divine speed.

The oldest of us is thirty: even so we have already scattered treasures, a thousand treasures of force, love, courage, astuteness, and raw will-power; have thrown them impatiently away, with fury, carelessly, unhesitatingly, breathless, and unresting ... Look at us! We are still untired! Our hearts know no weariness because they are fed with fire, hatred, and speed! ... Does that amaze you? It should, because you can never remember having lived! Erect on the summit of the world, once again we hurl our defiance at the stars!²⁰

‘You can never remember having lived!’ This is one of Marinetti’s starkest reproaches, when he hurls his first manifesto into the faces of the European bourgeoisie in 1909. The ‘Founding and Manifesto of Futurism’ proposes not only a revolution of the arts but introduces a completely new conception of life: fast, breathless and dedicated to violence and destruction, it is raw and unrefined, boundless and unrestricted by a society whose taboos and customs it declares obsolete. At first glance, this sounds like a final rending of Nietzsche’s Apollonian veil and an ultimate descent into the tumults of Dionysian festival, but Marinetti never proposes a regression to the animal state of unconscious violence. He expressly turns against excess and ecstasy, even though in the fervour of writing he often seems to forget his own rules. He calls for the destruction of society and its order only to replace it with a higher, superhuman order, the order of technology, which will bring about the birth of a new human being, a cross-breed between man and machine: ‘With us begins the reign of the man whose roots are cut, of the multiplied man who mixes himself with iron, who is fed by electricity and no longer understands anything except the lust for danger and daily heroism.’²¹ Multiplied man will defy the laws of nature and be subject only to the self-proclaimed laws of speed and technology. In his autonomy and sovereignty, this image of the new man is significantly informed by Nietzsche’s idea of the superman. Devoted to the pleasures of speed and more faithful to the shining metal body of his car and the cause of technology than to humanity, multiplied man also reflects the destructive, pleasure-seeking and unnatural man proclaimed by the Marquis de Sade, although Marinetti completely redefines sexuality for his mechanical universe. As we shall see, Marinetti’s machine man will make his appearance again and again throughout the century.

Since the publication of the Manifesto [...] Futurism has never stopped exciting the interest of the men and women of this century. All the vanguards have disappeared, one after the other. Only Futurism, received with sceptical smiles now as then, continues to thrive as a living reality and not as an archaeological phenomenon or in pure retrospective.²²

The fact that Futurism set out to merge life and art, and did indeed manage to infiltrate all the different areas of culture and society, guaranteed the movement's persistence in subsequent art forms.

Futurism's continued relevance in the art sphere is evident in the formation of the *Nuovo Futurismo* group in Italy in 1984. A group of seven artists came together to practise in the anarchic and playful spirit that had characterized the Futurists. They were above all interested in the second phase of Futurism and the artist Fortunato Depero's definition of art as 'joyful, impudent, exhilarating, modern and audacious.'²³ The particular parallels between Futurism and 1960s Pop Art, which inspired the *Nuovi Futuristi*, are also the subject of Pablo Echaurren's *Iconoclasta* series of collages from the mid-1990s, which join Futurist free-word-poetry and Disney characters to create 'Waltfuturismo' (see Figure 2). In 2008, the Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art in Bergamo organized an exhibition with the telling title: 'The Future of Futurism: From the "Italian Revolution" to Contemporary Art – From Boccioni to Fontana to Damian Hirst'. The exhibition juxtaposed Futurist artworks with works from the latter half of the twentieth century and up to the present day, showing the continuing influence of the movement.²⁴ In 2009 several big exhibitions were dedicated to mark the centenary of Futurism. While none of them was as focused on the legacy of the movement as the show in Bergamo, most of them, at least to some degree, addressed the impact Futurism had on subsequent artists.²⁵ However, the return of Futurism, which Renato Barilli called one of 'these moments of grand-returns',²⁶ affects more than the visual arts: it returns again and again in the broad field of popular culture, in poetry and prose, in cinema and television, and also in lifestyle magazines and advertising. Futurism after all set out to encompass the whole of life and, as such, it lives on.



Figure 2 Pablo Echaurren, *Untitled* (from *Iconoclasta* series), 1994, collage, 34 × 24 cm. Artist's possession. © The artist.

The Futurist conception of life is based on a deep rift between nature and technology which has its origins in the Enlightenment and continues to characterize present-day society. Moreover, as I will show, the Futurist utopian vision of a technological world devoted to speed and destruction has been realized in various ways over the last one hundred years. In many senses, however, it has turned into dystopia. This is not least of all due to the fact that the crash, former mere myth of rebirth, has re-entered the world of speed with all its fatal consequences.

Romantic Futurisms

Futurism set out to conquer and domesticate nature and saw its fiercest enemy in the emotional sentimentality and otherworldliness propagated by Romanticism and its various offspring, like the neo-Romanticism and Symbolism of Marinetti's era. And like Futurism, Romanticism continues to manifest itself not only in such art forms as land-art or neo-Dadaism but also in the search for transcendence and a higher meaning through (often Asian) religion as well as in the back-to-nature movement and an almost Wordsworthian idealization of the Middle Ages in popular culture.

In twentieth-century art and writing, Romantic and Futurist ideas and concepts appear again and again, side by side and intermingling or in open opposition to one another. Given the fact that Marinetti was so adamant in his opposition to Romanticism that he devoted numerous speeches, manifestos and poems to its criticism, I believe that Futurism can only be fully understood if it is seen in its troubled relation to Romanticism.

Despite Marinetti's claims to the opposite, I want to suggest a continuous trajectory from the late eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth and the emergence of Futurism. Though Marinetti attacks certain aspects of Romanticism outright, he is also indebted to it in many ways. In a letter to Marinetti of July 1914 Karl Vossler even suggested that

Futurism has within it something that has already come and gone, something dead or, better, still-born: to wit, the same ironic and playful sense of humor [*umorismo*] with respect to the real that, though stale as could be,

can be found in the Romantics, especially the German Romantics. The latter informs Schelling's theory and programme and the art and style of the Schlegels, Hoffman, etc.²⁷

While Vossler's criticism is too harsh in reducing Futurism to a mere repetition of what has been done before, there are indeed several undeniable parallels and coincidences between Futurism and (German) Romanticism, which will be explored further in the following chapters.

What Marinetti, and later his followers and companions, proposed in the many manifestos that make up the movement was indeed in many respects completely novel. But in order to create something new, one has to start from somewhere. 'Art is, among many other things, continuity', wrote Clement Greenberg in 1960. 'Without the past of art, and without the need and compulsion to maintain past standards of excellence, such a thing as Modernist art would be impossible.'²⁸ In the specific case of Marinetti's Futurist writings, we could say that his very conscious break with the past and, in particular, his strong opposition towards the Romantic tradition constitute a form of continuity in their own right. Futurism is not so much a break with, but rather a departure from, past traditions, and in some respects a continuation of old ideas.

Marinetti's attack on Romanticism is at its most fierce when it comes to the twin concepts of love and death. While Futurism redefines sexuality in the terms of masculinity, violence and speed, death appears in two different shapes: actual death and Romantic death. The actual death of the individual is no longer felt as a loss but as a necessity for the progress of man and, if it is a violent death, as a heroic culmination of life and a stepping-stone for the next generation. Futurism's second version of death, Romantic death, is metaphoric and closely associated with conventional sexuality and love between men and women. This Romantic death signifies stagnation and threatens the progress attained by actual Futurist death. Woman becomes a symbol of this death, an embodiment of stasis. In the new Futurist world order, however, this feminine death must be impotent, but it haunts man disguised as prostitute, as sweet wife, or as the beckoning charms of the ancient feminine symbol, the moon. As long as man is subject to the love of women he remains part of nature and will be vulnerable to the seductive charms of this female death.

Chapter 1 looks at Futurism in relation to threatening and sexually exciting Romantic nature. The Romantics accepted nature as a supreme and

invincible power, which entered them through sexual desire. In Futurism, sexuality and nature are demystified and superseded by technology; death and corruption are defeated by man's embrace of electricity and speed. Futurist man strives for a loss of the self in the mass and a union with speed through his close relation to the car, locomotive or aeroplane. Rather than individual transport, the car is here seen as part of a fleet where drivers and mechanics interact with each other and those around them. The infinite progress promised by 'the new divinity' of speed replaces the static reunion of Romantic love and death-desire. The chapter further examines Marinetti's creation of a new man, the 'mechanical' or 'multiplied' man, in relation to the Sadean concept of cruel and selfish nature. While Sade's degenerate protagonists give in wholly to their primitive lust and desires, the Futurist ideal man dominates and controls nature's cruelty through technology and redirects its energy into the flow of progress. Here I will also discuss the dichotomy between chaos and order which underlies both the Sadean world and Futurism in general. Indeed, almost all the Futurist manifestos, poems and visual art display the same conflict between order and chaos – systematic chaos, contained within a tightly knit pattern. In its radical embrace of technology the Futurist aesthetics of order and chaos not only glorifies but also aestheticizes war and gives rise to the concept of mechanical beauty. This will return later in my analysis of Warhol's *Death in America* series (Chapter 4) and Ballard's and Cronenberg's *Crash* (Chapter 7).

Chapter 2 continues the theme of chaos and order by comparing the pragmatics of Fordism to the poetic concepts of Futurism. It explores the lyrical and economic ideals of the human as machine, Futurist 'multiplied man' or what Gramsci called 'Fordian man'. By juxtaposing the artistic movement of Futurism with the economic practice of Fordism, it shows how close artistic production and the realities of factory production could come in the beginning of the twentieth century, a time when the rapid advances of technology generated an enthusiasm and a confidence in the powers of human progress that have never since been surpassed. This chapter also touches on the politics of Futurism with a special focus on early Futurism's manifestation as a workers' movement with strong socialist ties.

Chapter 3 in some way serves as a link between the first part of the book and the following two, which are organized around a number of case studies to map the path through car crash culture since the end of the Second World War. It gives an overview of the second wave of automobile

enthusiasm in the 1950s, when the car became available to the masses and reshaped the cities and the countryside in much the way Marinetti had imagined. Driving in the new world of concrete is decidedly Romantic: in the American context, this is most obvious in the writings of the Beat poets, notably Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), and in the road movies of the 1960s and 1970s. Here, we reencounter the idea of pushing the frontier westwards towards the unknown and the individualism and freedom of driving. But from the 1960s and Ralph Nader's publication of *Unsafe at Any Speed* (first published in 1965), the celebration of the car is joined by an increasing awareness of and fascination with the crash. The chapter closes with an analysis of Richard Sarafian's *Vanishing Point* (1971), which is at once an ode to speed and an indication that America's golden era of motoring and unlimited speed is coming to an end.

Indeed, the car crash depicted in art and writing after the 1950s is filled with an entirely new importance: the importance of visual death, or rather, public death. As Nietzsche said, the perpetual motion of life also includes death. But, with the arrival of modernity, death (outside the slaughter of the two world wars) is slowly being eliminated and pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. In Western society nowadays, a natural death very rarely occurs in public. Philippe Ariès even speaks of a loss of death, which has become so regulated and organized by bureaucrats that it 'no longer belongs to the dying man [...] nor to the family.'²⁹ At least since the 1950s, a public death is almost invariably an accidental death. And the most frequent public death is death in a car crash.

Let us return to Barthes's Gothic cathedrals for a moment: in the nineteenth century these grand buildings had a peculiar revival. Especially in a state of ruin they captured the imagination of artists and poets, who experienced the peace and harmony of an omnipotent benevolent nature among the overgrown statues and crumbled arches. I believe that it is possible to draw another parallel between the Gothic cathedral and the car here. The crashed car is as important for the latter part of the twentieth century as the ruined cathedral was for the nineteenth. The answers the Romantics once sought among crumbled stones and creepers now lie hidden within the contours of twisted metal.

Art and design allow us to change the negative into positive [writes Iglesias Algora in *Belio*], we can free ourselves by creating beautiful crashed cars, evolving into the abstract, re-designing closed systems and mechanics,

reconstructing the pieces in a new chaotic order, which allows us to control these supposedly perfect machines, which we love but which also tie us down. Which won't let us forget that there is a certain undeniable fetishism between man and machine.³⁰

The car crash at once frees us from enslavement to speed and, as object of art, allows us to recover a certain degree of control over death. Especially since the 1960s, the crashed car has had greater symbolic power than the intact car. Of course, this is not to say that it is no longer celebrated. Quite the contrary: we need only think of Andy Warhol's 1986/1987 series of prints and paintings for Mercedes Benz or BMW's art cars, which have been painted by such artists as Frank Stella, Andy Warhol, Roy Liechtenstein, Jenny Holzer and, most recently, Jeff Koons. On the whole, however, after Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* the unquestioning celebration of the car and its velocity is no longer possible.

The second and third parts of the book consequently focus mainly on crashed cars and death and on the attendant phenomenon of the traffic jam, exploring the artistic reaction to the partial realization of Marinetti's utopia in the latter half of the century and going beyond speed and into the creation of 'beautiful crashed cars'. As it would be quite beyond the reach of this book to consider the entirety of the wide range of artistic engagement with the car and the crash I explore these themes through a number of specific case studies. Some of these, like Andy Warhol's *Death in America* series or J. G. Ballard's and David Cronenberg's *Crash*, might seem more obvious than others, like the photographs of Antun Maračić or Arnold Odermatt. However, the examples I have chosen, though motivated by subjective reasons, are all representative for their particular period in Western culture, while their significance and sometimes their influence reach beyond their regional and temporal context.

Just as Modernism (including the initial phase of Futurism) and Romanticism were broad and international in scope, transcending disciplines and national borders, my approach is international and interdisciplinary. I hope to reflect the many varieties and similarities that make American-European culture into the uneasy whole of 'Western' culture by looking at such varied places as Italy, Croatia, North America, Germany, France, Switzerland and Britain. European and North American cultures, of course, share similar traditions and belief systems and are closely linked to each other. They also share a common history of the motorcar in the cultural imagination as much as in architectural urban planning.

While I have suggested a continuous trajectory from Romanticism to Futurism in the first part of the book, the second part follows the many returns of Futurism and Romanticism in cultural production since the Second World War. The chapters follow a rough chronological order from the 1950s to now, also taking account of the historical situation in which the works were produced.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on the return and partial realization of Marinetti's rootless man who lives in the absolute beyond space and time. Contesting the theories of Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard, who speak of the disappearance of space and time and an increasing fluctuation of reality into virtual space, Chapter 4 explores Andy Warhol's repetition of the fatal crash in his 1960s *Death in America* series (1962/1963) and the work of the Croatian photographer Antun Maračić, whose series *Sideroad Monuments* (2001) and *Cro Car Crash Chronicle, after War/hol* (2001), take up Warhol's serial prints of accidents. *Sideroad Monuments*, however, goes one step further, showing empty roads and sombre white gravestones rather than the crash itself. For both Warhol and Maračić, repetition serves as a tool to reanimate stopped motion and make visible the space Virilio and Baudrillard claim has disappeared in the whirlwind of speed. Though Maračić produced his series four decades after Warhol he consciously refers to Pop Art and the excessive consumerism of 1960s America, which he sees repeated in post-war and post-communist Croatia. While his focus is on the specific situation in the former Eastern Bloc and the steep rise of traffic accidents after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Maračić's critical view of car (consumer) culture also reflects developments in the 'old' West.

Chapter 5 is also concerned with the aftermath of the crash and a reconfiguring of space and time. As mentioned earlier, I believe that for our times, the car crash can actually be seen as 'almost the exact equivalent' of the ruined Gothic cathedral in Romantic painting. The chapter focuses on Caspar David Friedrich's portrayals of ruins and a sublime nature and explores the paintings' reverberation in the car crash photographs of artist and police photographer Arnold Odermatt. The twentieth-century photographer and the nineteenth-century painter shared the same vision of nature and the place of the ruin within. As both look for a hidden harmony, the car wreck/cathedral ruin becomes a vehicle for exploring notions of death and rebirth and the relation of the human to nature.

This search for a lost harmony somewhere hidden at the roadside is also at the heart of Julio Cortázar's short story 'The Motorway of the

South³¹ (1966), which treats the post-speed landscape of an eternal traffic jam, and his book *The Autonauts of the Cosmoroute or an Atemporal Journey: Paris– Marseilles* (1983), a travelogue which he co-wrote with Carol Dunlop about a thirty-two-day journey along the Autoroute du Sud between Paris and Marseilles. Both works are at the centre of Chapter 6. Here, speed is abjured in favour of slow motion and – at least in the case of *The Autonauts* – a decidedly Romantic turning towards (if not a return to) nature. Cortázar’s rather benign and optimistic view of humanity is sharply contrasted with Godard’s pessimistic vision of anti-social ‘motorized man’ in *Week End* (1967), which uses Cortázar’s infinite traffic jam as a background or stage set.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 explore Marinetti’s proposed merger of human and car in a mechanical universe. In the eyes of cultural pessimists like Baudrillard, Virilio or Zygmunt Bauman, this has led to a disaffected and indifferent world beyond moral and ethic values. Again, I want to suggest other ways of perceiving contemporary culture. Chapter 7 examines the post-erotic machine men of Ballard’s and Cronenberg’s *Crash* (1973 and 1996, respectively), where humans adopt the characteristics of cars. While this depiction at first appears as a straightforward rendering of indifference, disaffection and inhumanity, I believe that both the subject matter as well as the social and artistic context that surrounded the production and controversial reception of *Crash* in both 1973 and 1996 form a more complex picture of contemporary culture.

Chapter 8 looks at Sarah Lucas, who is, more by chance than on purpose, the only female artist whose work I analyse at greater length. Since 1997, Lucas has made a number of installations for which she uses old, battered and sometimes crashed cars. In those works she is playing with the emotions that link us to the mythical entity ‘automobile’, to that which is more than just a vehicle of transport. These installations make one thing clear: while Marinetti’s vision of mechanical man has not come true, cars have certainly become more human.

Chapter 9, finally, analyses Quentin Tarantino’s film *Death Proof* (2007), which is read as an answer to, or perhaps an unconscious continuation of, Futurism. However, the embrace of violence and speed that was still shocking in Marinetti’s time now has become part and parcel of contemporary popular culture. In Tarantino’s film mechanical man and his car have become vehicles of nostalgia for a time when limits could still be broken.

And now let me invite you on a journey through the past one hundred years along the straight road of progress and its many diversions, past traffic jams and pile-ups, over fly-overs and suspension bridges, along the multilane highways of the twentieth century to the junkyards of the future.