

Introduction: #ESTVL

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WHERE HAVE ALL THE LETTERS GONE? OMG, LOL, IMO, DNC, 1WR, MGMT, FFS, 4EVAYNG: in texts and tweets as on billboards and vanity plates, alphabetical shortcuts abound. Consonants lost, vowels redacted, abbreviations run riot—communication today, seemingly boundless in the cloud, has nonetheless become habitually, ritually parsimonious, given over to truncation and absence. The aim must be speed, expediency, and efficiency: to make our messages and their sentiments keep pace with the breathless velocities of the network. Does the subtext, though, involve doing more with less—a submission to the logic of austerity in the material idioms of language itself? Would we rather structurally adjust our own vocabularies than risk having the IMF do it for us?

“Fast Evil” (not “Festival”): the prompt we on the *ESC* shop floor decided to give to prospective speakers on our annual *ESC* roundtable at Congress in Ottawa last May. We wanted to hear what academics from an array of fields might have to say about evil’s speed and speed’s evil. The present moment, we ventured, is one fastened to fastness: from fast food to high-frequency cyber-trading; from the “quick fix” to the drone strike; from voracious energy consumption to flash floods; from academic fads to sudden cuts; from the ephemerality of social media to the instantaneous

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obsolescence of everything. Such cultural velocities characterize the onset of the twenty-first century. How, we asked, do they bear on the intellectual and pedagogical work unfolding in English Studies today? Flexing our meta-muscles, we insisted that presentations take no more than three minutes to deliver, a quickening constraint enforced on the day itself as boisterously as strictly with alarms and shouts. Sadly, we failed to think to tweet “#FSTVL” in advance of the panel (a regrettable promotional lapse made less surprising, if no more forgivable, by the fact that this co-editor does not own a smartphone). Hopefully members of the audience made up for the oversight by burning up Twitter and Snapchat and Instagram with rapturous tidbits about the event.

As you will see from the forum that follows, the pieces of which all hold pretty faithfully to the original presentations, our contributors did not disappoint: they have produced eight wonderfully varied, testingly provocative meditations on the phrase and idea “fast evil.” In so doing, they have also caught us out and showed us up—precisely for being *too quick*. From the very start of the project, we had taken for granted that the evil at stake in “fast evil” was speed, velocity, acceleration. But the talks given by our panelists and now collected in this forum put real pressure on that hasty premise by demanding and provoking a more sustained engagement with what, exactly, the idea of being “fastened to fastness” might actually mean and entail. For if—as we presumed—“fast evil” immediately suggests speed, then its second sense, following tight on the first, suggests nearly the opposite: fastness as fixity or fixation. Fast evil is quicksilver, incendiary, blazing through, yet also obdurate, lithified, going nowhere: here to stay. This double sense, contradictory at first glance, indicates something important about fast evil in particular as about the contemporary problem of velocity more generally: that what’s at stake has less to do with some absolute opposition between fast and slow than with their differential calibration and distribution. Put another way, the contemporary problem of velocity is a matter of *rhythm*: rhythm as it modulates or mediates different rates of speed, as it pulses between quicksilver and obdurate fastnesses.

We are thrilled, then, to feature this Readers’ Forum on “fast evil.” Not only do its contributors offer a keen set of perspectives—from an ode to slow to the speed genie; from fast seeing to fast zombies; from fast analysis to the ethics of speed-space; and from situations of stuckness to circuits of offendedness—they also conspire to change the pace and test new rhythms for argument, for analysis, for polemic. Their pieces will stick in your mind as they blow you away.