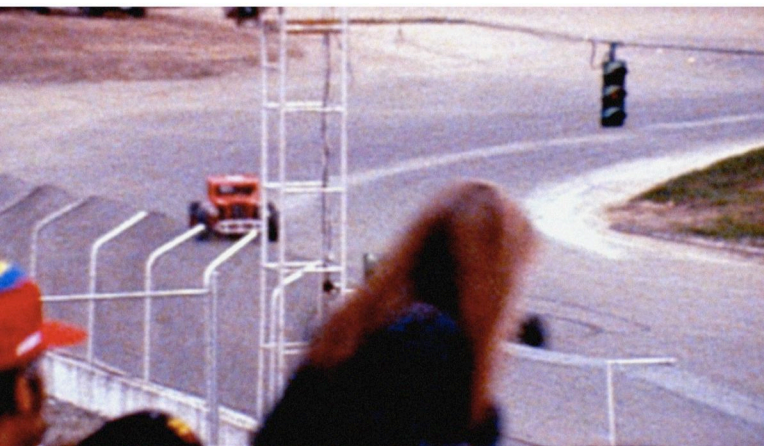


Engines of Despair

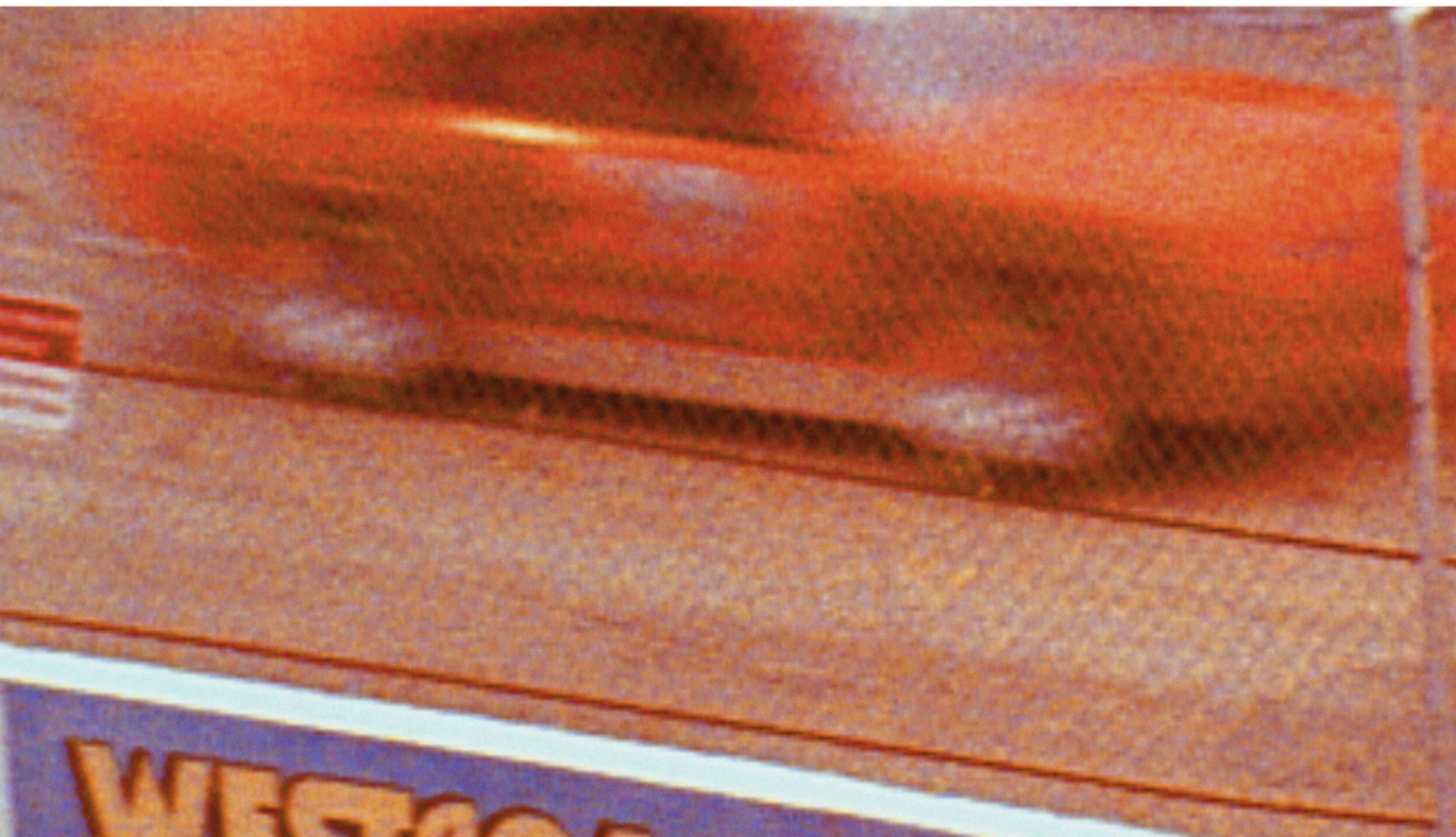
*That Republic was a deceptive model of perfection. It might be realized by some dictator, but it could only function as a machine functions—mechanically. And machines function mechanically only because they are made of dead inorganic materials. If you want to express the difference between an organic progressive society and a static totalitarian regime, you can do so in one word: this is art.*

— from JOURNEY THROUGH UTOPIA by Marie Louise Berneri.







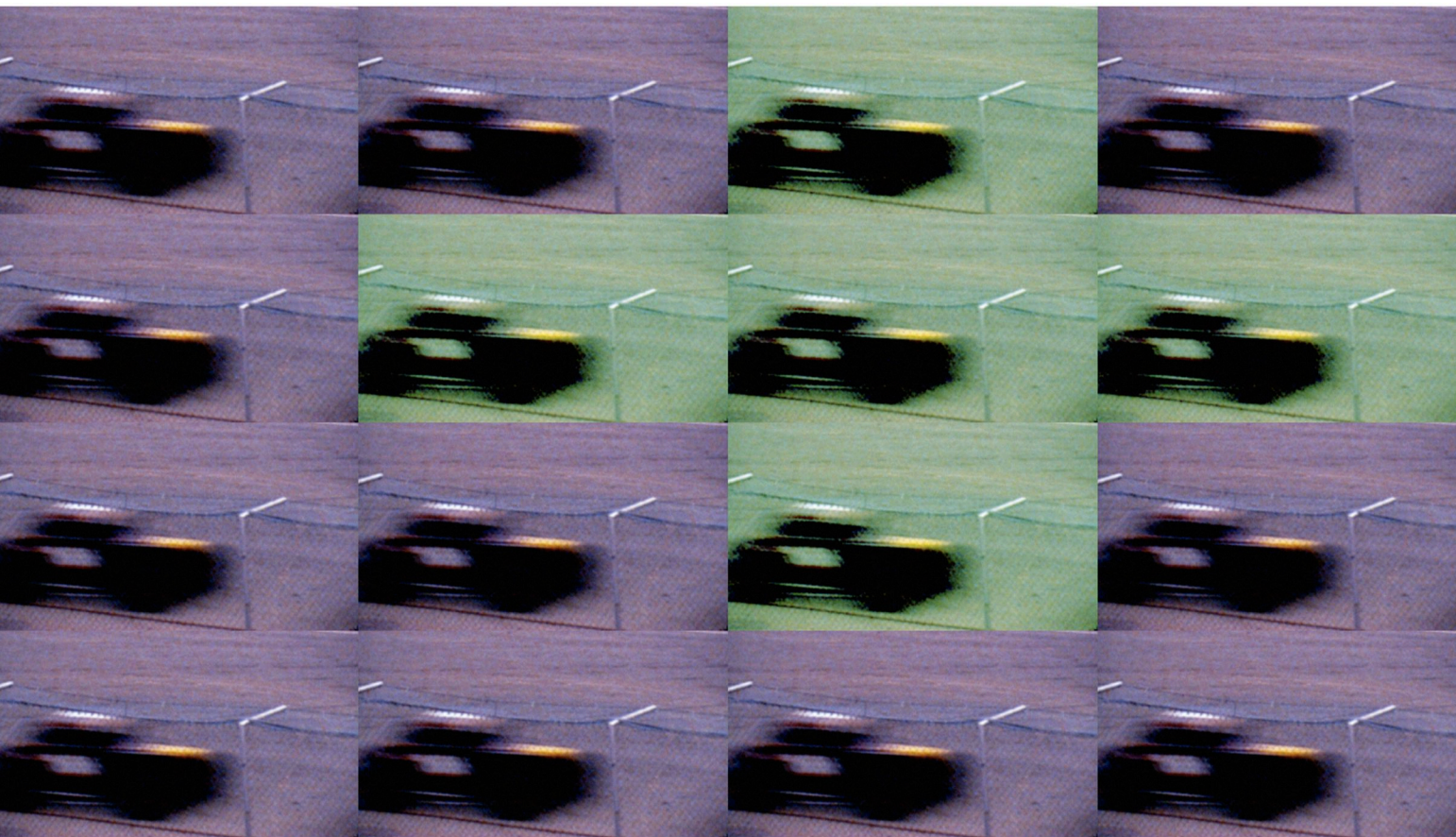


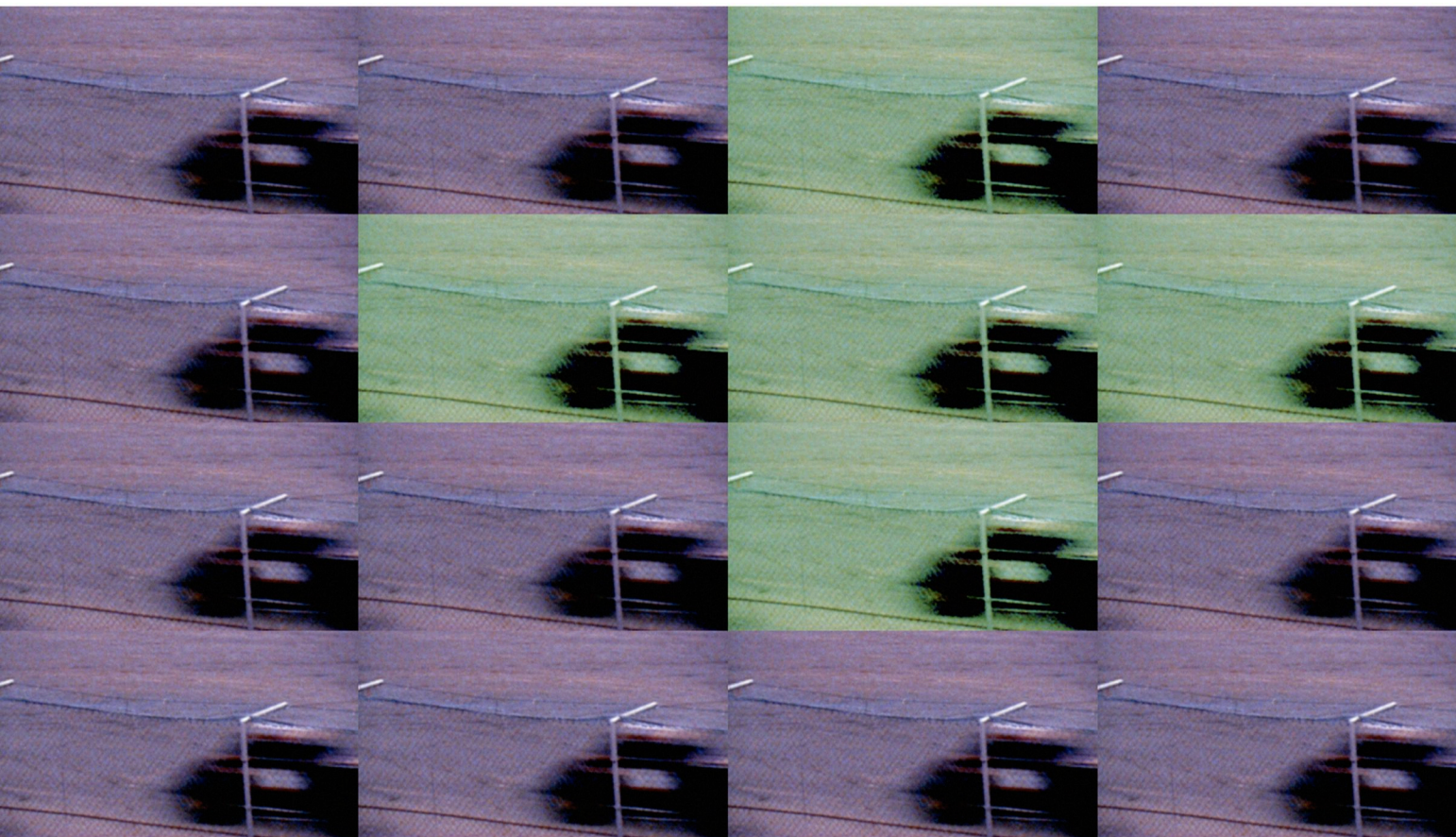






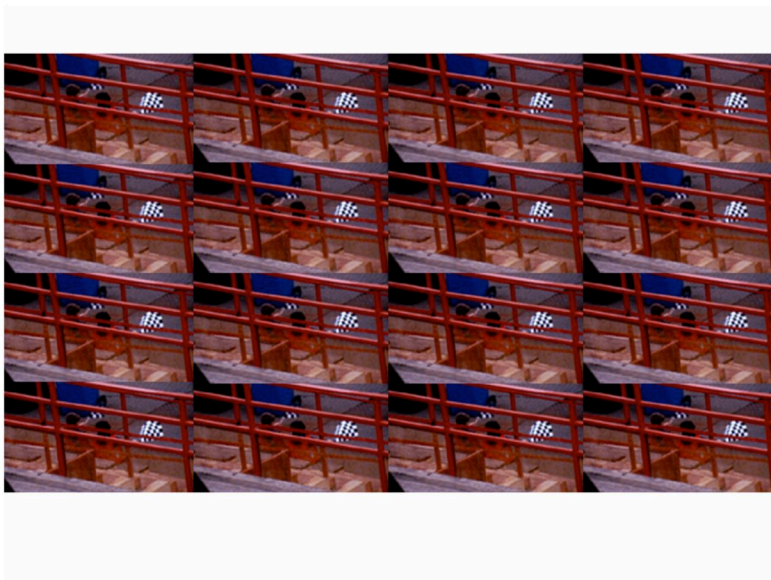
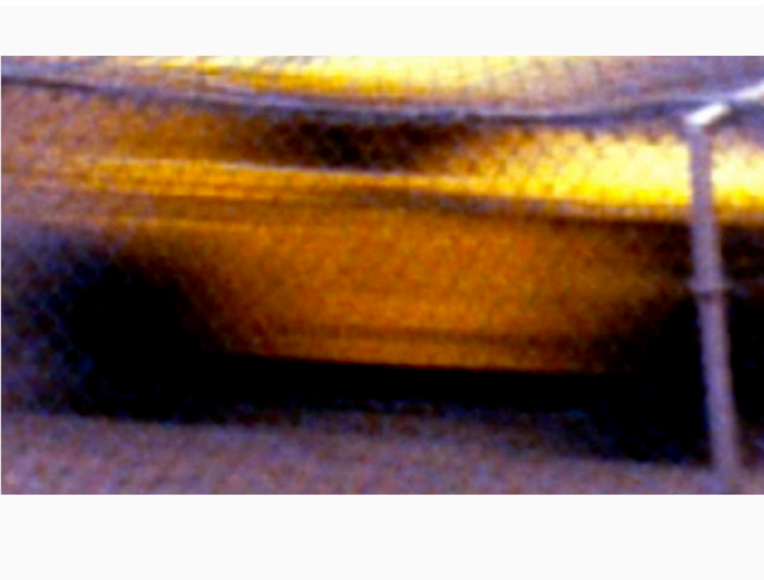


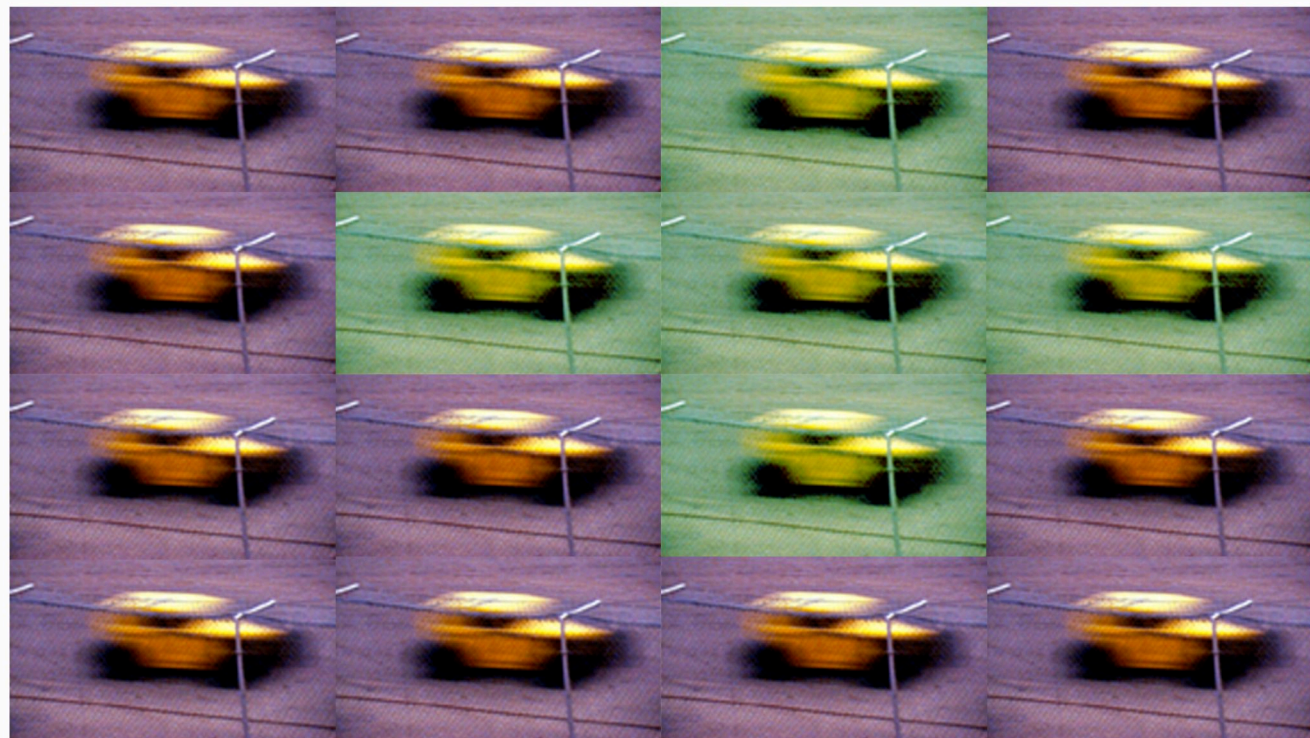




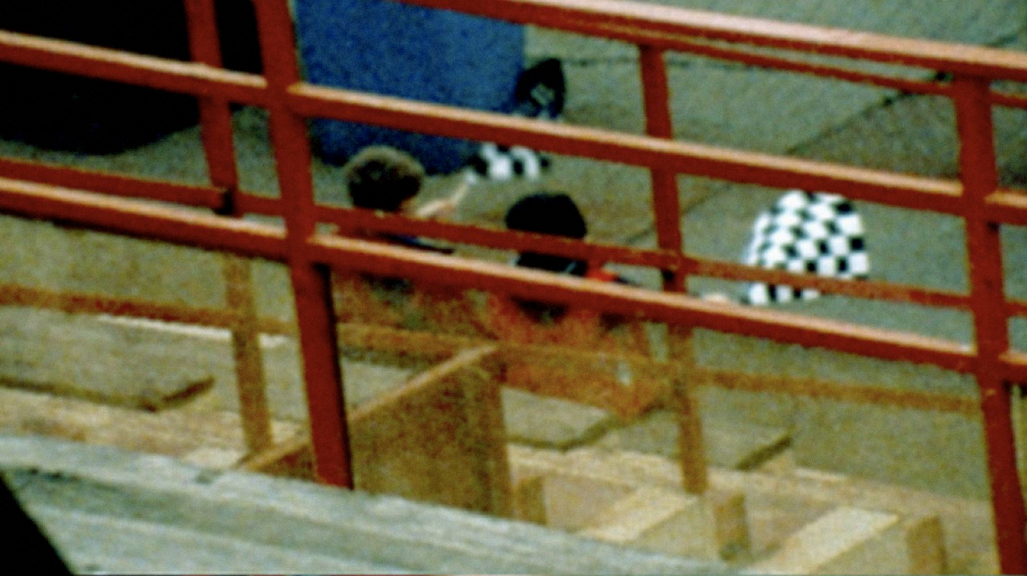












# Engines of Despair

Conn in 2008:

I grew up going to stock car races with my Dad at Western Speedway, a small oval in Metchosin, B.C. He was in a pit crew. We'd arrive early, so I could sit in the same spot each week, at the top of the grandstands above the finish line. The races were important, but it was the whole setting, it was rich with shifting colour, pattern, and graceful movement. It would start in sun and end under the lights. And the sound of the cars, a deep, male roar.

I also watched TV. What stands out now is the memory of one race. Richard Petty was my hero, the most successful stock car racer in history, by far. Dave Pearson and Cale Yarborough had the misfortune of racing during the Petty era. In this race they were trading the lead back and forth over 500 laps, sometimes nudging each other at top speed and skimming the track walls, veering high and low. It was a rare display of racing skill.

Petty had a problem with his car early on, he'd gradually climbed his way back to third place but there wouldn't be time to catch up. He was a half mile back in the final lap when Pearson and Yarborough rounded the last bend, still wildly moving back and forth up and down the width of the track trying desperately to either pass or block each other. Suddenly, in the main straightaway, they contacted each other too hard and lost control. They were a few hundred feet from the finish line.

As they spun off in different directions and left the track, Richard Petty rounded the last corner and drove calmly through their billowing smoke, to win.

This race made a big impression on me. There seemed to be some universal secret that Richard Petty had figured out. He always had an easy-going smile. He lived in that special place where things seem to fall into place in just the right way. For most people this happens on rare, great days. But for him it was all the time.

I mentioned this race to my father recently, which he remembers (it's famous, you can buy it on DVD). He disagreed with my conclusion. He said the reason that Pearson and Yarborough had crashed was because they knew that Richard Petty was behind them. It wasn't luck, Petty pressured them into making a mistake.

I think Pearson and Yarborough ended up in a fist fight after the race, as so often happened back then.

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Today, car racing seems indefensible in the face of global warming, which is one thing I brought with me to Western Speedway when I returned to make a film. But I enjoyed the racing too.

People love to watch and make patterns, we think in patterns. New thought is developed through recognizing variation in known pattern, and this gives us pleasure. The spectators at the race were as interesting as the cars, their heads turning in unison to follow the racing, their charge of reaction when a car spun out. They were part of the patterns themselves: the flawed, lovely, awful patterns.

I both love and hate cars at the same time. This is normal, I can love their shapes and sounds and smells and still want them gone. That's just part of how the mind works, in contrasting ideas, the creation of movement, and the pleasure of both pain and joy.

## Images

Page 2	Media Tiles: Woman on Stairs with Title
Page 3	Car Skids, Man in Hat
Page 4	Media Tiles: Filming the Race, CU
Page 5	Speeding Orange Car
Page 6	Media Tiles: Filming the Race
Page 7	Media Tiles: Boys with Checkered Flags
Page 8	Boys with Checkered Flags
Page 9	Media Tiles: Speeding Orange Cars
Page 10	Media Tiles: Speeding Black Cars, Cross 1
Page 11	Media Tiles: Speeding Black Cars, Cross 2
Page 12	Media Tiles: Man in Hat, Traffic Light
Page 13	Media Tiles: Speeding Yellow Cars
Page 14	Speeding Yellow Car + Media Tiles: Boys with Flags
Page 15	Media Tiles: Speeding Yellow Cars, Cross
Page 16	Media Tiles: Boys With Checkered Flags, Pink
Page 17	Media Tiles: Boys With Checkered Flags, Green



Clive Holden

2008