

FACEBOOK'S DA BOMB

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Hi! H-I-G-H. I am a middle-aged teacher living most of my waking hours among young adults. After an appendectomy with some complications, I am floating in a thin atmosphere of pain and morphine. But I just had a visitor, and now, as many artists in fugue are wont to do, I'd like to philosophize about her.

Her name is Tomato Berk. Tomato is a product of the aforementioned young adult environment, which also means she's a speed freak. Not that kind. She loves fast things, thinks and acts fast, and lives fast, which means something totally different than living fast meant 60 years ago. I'll tell you about her wild world of fast, but first ... a word about time.

If Jim Croce *had* put time in a bottle, teens and young adults would be buying it (especially if that bottle were recyclable and sold at Jamba Juice.) While linear time is arguably something man created, the internal time

clock of the human body works like this: the first time a young person becomes aware of a "day," it seems really, really long. After that, every day lived and noticed seems a little shorter until the "day" disappears completely. Somewhere in the middle of this process, people try and do everything possible to stop that shrinking down of time and sometimes they actually do slow it down—by cramming it full of stuff that weighs human body time down, stuff such as responsibility, work, and guilt. This self-burdening, by inverse proportion, makes life (which is out-of-body for most intents and purposes) seem "fast." Residents in the current cramming era of the 21st century have more doodads, gadgets, and flibbertigibbets than ever to help their cramming. This brings me back to Tomato.

I am coming in and out of my oxycontin fugue, and I hear Tomato texting her friends on her Blackberry. Tomato is fast because she abbreviates everything; Tomato can text 90 words a minute. I wonder how someone in B.B. (Before Blackberry) would contextualize this fuzzy cacophony of clicks punctuated with sniggers, harrumphs, and chuffs. The modern young adults are cyborgs just like the prescient Donna Haraway predicted: wired up and downloaded, always a bell or buzzer going.

Fast also means taking shortcuts. Tomato likes to abbreviate beyond the typical text abbreviations. She finger-shapes "whatevs," substitutes "tank" for apartment, "bf" for best friend. She is "ti-ti" (tired), "flunk" (feeling sick), and "prool" (pretty cool.) She and her friends like music that accentuates an absent portamento over a long glissando. (To experience this, listen to Cher's "Believe" for absent portamento, an early Judy Garland tune for glissando.)

Tomato and her group move so fast, they live in a kind of blur, very similar to the shimmery thing I am seeing at the foot of my bed. Hello there, hallucination!

Tomato and her group talk fast...physically. Sometimes I don't fully decipher Tomato's message until she is 20 feet from me. It's as if she is moving forward with ever increasing speed to catch up the next big thing, while the next big thing speeds away from her. At the end of the chase, I am in a time zone way behind them. In other words, Tomato and her peeps are riding the front end of a cyber-driven train, and as an older adult, I am living in their Doppler Effect.

Fast means other things in this youth's world. For instance, Tomato has a streamlined red fades haircut for speedy skateboard, rollerblade, and boogie board turns. Her retro Vega stocks nitro. Tomato, like many enthusiasts of *Motorcyclist Magazine*, believes that speed limits are ridiculous because 1) they are geared to the lamest driver and 2) nobody obeys them.

Tomato follows no one and everyone. To get all of the experience that she can, she lives in a nether world between male and female. She is very girly at times, and at others, she is downright macho. In the middle, she is a very androgynous individual, and amalgamation of everyone she sees, hears, and admires.

"Tomato Berk" is even a truncated name; it's the one she uses at Starbucks and speed dating.

On that fast front, Tomato has "finished" (her word) her third boyfriend this semester. She is a big fan of speed dating, and reminisces on one of her speed dates as "the love of a nighttime." She and that young man made a pact to have a whole relationship over the course of one night. By the middle two "dates" they had talked about their favorite bands and music, summarized the "tank sitch," and told each other their ...ahem...current sexual fantasy (which is a lot sexier than having sex for reals, Tomato says.)

This Aesop's fable dilution by sheer quantity is a new defense young people have created for the war on time and its deadly march. The best example of its effectiveness in action is Facebook. Tomato loves Facebook. And she loves playing games with her friends on it, games like who can find the most friends? And who can reject the most friends? And who can add and then reject the most of the same friends in the littlest amount of time?

Ah, here comes my nurse who smells like coffee with my noon pillow fluff and some more medicine. And now the shimmery thing at the bottom of the bed is coming over, too...

Hi Schmoo! Can I call you Schmoo? You and I don't like to go fast, do we Schmoo? What's that, Schmoo? Oh, you like what I was saying about Facebook? You agree that its whole goal is to speed up the natural aging of people's relationships? You understand that Facebook especially targets people who can't say "no, PeteFeet, I don't want to be your friend just b/c you were in my kindergarten class!" It searches out people who are afraid to hit the reject a friend button because

they remember that episode of Twilight Zone with the black box and the button! On the other hand, it teaches some loving children to reject others with glee... while answering inane quiz questions!

You're so right, Schmoo! Facebook does allow strangers and stalkers who know someone who knows someone who knows you to read some of your silly notes on a wall, or make a much bigger deal than is necessary over a lapsed response; it allows these Faces to flip through your photo albums and find out what color you are! It encourages people to join cliques! Facebook makes you have so many friends, friendship as a valuable commodity becomes cyber-thin! It uses up all your free time by hypnotizing with the same quiz over and over! It makes some people you really want to be your real friend add you to their friend list just because they are afraid not to! It makes people believe that everyone on this planet wants to know 10, 15, 25, 1,000 inane details about their life! It makes them spread fake flowers and fish across the world! It causes ennui, drama, revulsion, and compulsion.

Schmoo! I call shenanigans! Schmoo! Facebook's ...da bomb! Tomato!

She's back, beside my hospital bed. But why is Tomato smiling? I must have blurted out the secret that Facebook is the ultimate bomb! Is she involved with the Facebook conspiracy? Where is Schmoo, nurse???? Where is Nurse Percocet, Schmoo????

I have to save Tomato from herself so I grab her bouquet of real-life flowers in one hand and her real-time face in the other. Then I shove both our faces into the authentic greenery, where all we can hear is the vibration of the leaves.

Proooooool.